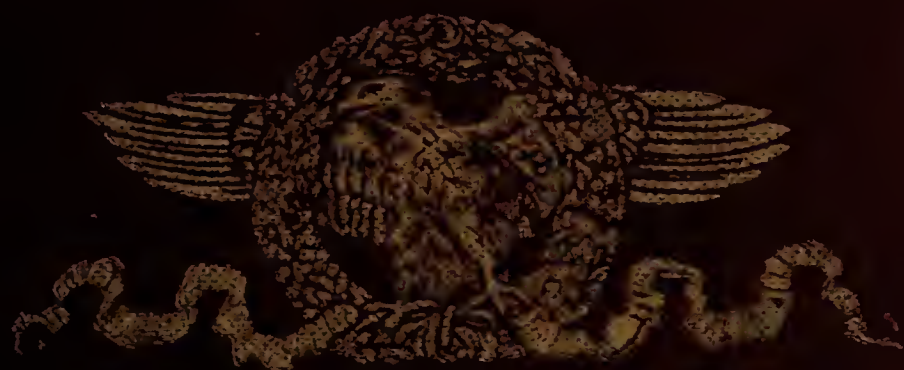


OCTAVIA
A TALE OF
ANCIENT ROME



SEYMOUR VAN SANTVOORD

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OCTAVIA



Ideal Head of Octavia

OCTAVIA

A Tale of Ancient Rome

BY

SEYMOUR VAN SANTVOORD

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF CÆSAR AND
THE IMPERIAL DISEASE"



"Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt."

NEW YORK

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IN MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
AND OF OUR
MANY HAPPY PILGRIMAGES
TO THE ETERNAL CITY

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INTRODUCTION

In all the dread history of the early Roman Emperors there is no more dramatic story than that of Octavia. In her veins ran the blood of Marc Antony, of Drusus the upright brother of Tiberius and of the first Octavia, through whom, in the maternal line, she traced to the father of the great Dictator, who himself boasted descent from that son of Æneas who after the fall of Troy founded the Eternal City. A darker current was contributed by her father, the depraved and imbecile Claudius, by her mother, whose very name has become a synonym for female depravity, and by her great-grandmother Livia, who more than once committed the crime of domestic murder in furtherance of her selfish ends. Through some strange display of atavism she escaped the congenital taints and deformities of her race, while inheriting the purity and nobility of her namesake, the beautiful sister of Augustus. Her noble birth, her sweet and gentle disposition, the tenderness of the relation between the ill-fated Britannicus and herself, the ignominious end of her mother, followed closely by that of her first betrothed—whose noble and engaging qualities had gained her childish affection, and whose self-imposed death under a shameful accusation must have deeply shocked her pure and sensitive spirit—her compulsory marriage with the abominable Nero, the tragic ending of her father and brother, and her own dreadful death, constitute the essentials of a tragedy which in the annals of ancient Rome has no rival in its appeal to human sympathy and pity. And strangely it happens that the only extant *fabula prætexta*, or Roman historical drama, which has come down to us in

its complete form, is the *Octavia* of Seneca, of which the unhappy fate of the last Claudian princess is the theme.

The agony of Gethsemane had barely preceded her birth in the magnificent "City of all the Gods," at a time when vice was enthroned, when sensuality was worshipped, when an apotheosis was ascribed to crime. In such a setting the revelation of a life so full of horrors and so touchingly pathetic as that of this rarely beautiful and unsullied Roman girl needs only the assurance, for which there seems to be foundation of fact, that Octavia was a Christian, to arouse something akin to reverence for this victim of a debased Idea at the hand of the besotted monster who dragged her through the mire but could not destroy the whiteness of her soul.

In this story of one of the saddest episodes in the Tragedy of the Cæsars, as it is modestly hoped pictured with classic accuracy, I have followed closely in the footsteps of history and of accepted tradition; although it is to be remembered that in the field of antiquities—as in most realms of human research—frequently it is impossible to reconcile the conclusions of scholars and students who enjoy a like degree of eminence, as well in matters of basic importance as in those of lesser consequence. For the most part the *dramatis personæ* are among those who figure prominently in the chronicles of the time, the novelist's privileges having been exercised only in the characters of Pythias, of her lover Junius Varus, the patrician friend of Silanus, and of their prætorian comrade, Marcus. The Pythias of Tacitus and Dio was not of noble family. She was that slave of Octavia who under torture to induce false testimony against the Empress addressed to the infamous Tigellinus that unprintable remark—"that scathing sarcasm which clings like the shirt of Nessus to his name"—which has found a place in history. The other characters have been given the precise parts allotted and the attributes ascribed to them by the Fathers—with due regard to the dogmas of modern com-

mentators. And if actually Octavia never was baptized by the Apostle, I am sure she was embathed in the spirit of Christ and enrolled among the pure in heart who shall see God.

SEYMOUR VAN SANTVOORD.

Troy, N. Y., January 1, 1923.

OCTAVIA

OCTAVIA

I

THE RETURN OF FABIVS

THE sun had not yet begun to curtain its rising with the cloudy reds of the orient when a solitary figure emerged from the door of a little tavern, embowered in vines and shaded by cypresses, alongside the Appian Way near the tenth milestone. In latter day nomenclature it was toward the end of October in the year 40 of the Christian Era: the historian of the time would have chronicled it as the tenth day before the Kalends of November in the year 793 from the Foundation of the City.

When the traveler—for such he was—had arrived at the inn the night before, it was late, the sky was heavily overcast, and aside from the bare consciousness of propinquity there had been nothing to bring home to him the fact that Rome was close at hand. Fatigued by the day's journey through the autumn heat, the last of many similar days since he had landed at Brundisium, he had retired early. But at the first hint of dawn he had stolen out, unobserved, to give full play to the emotions aroused by the circumstances of his homecoming, after an absence of many years.

Although dressed as a civilian, the military habit was plainly reflected in his carriage and bearing. Erect, vigorous, proudly self-conscious and with an easy air of authority, he bore the stamp of his Roman extraction and

as well of the patrician caste. It needed only the military garb and a few sunburned legions at his heels to have created the impression that some general of consular rank was here awaiting reply from the Senate to his request for the honor of a triumph in recognition of noteworthy service to the State. And the emotions aroused by such an occasion would not have been new to him.

The last time he had entered the city was after a night's encampment outside the walls with the victorious legions of Germanicus bringing home the last of the recaptured Eagles of the ill-fated Varus. Then, in that proud entry through the Triumphal Gate, the long march through the Campus Martius, over the Sacra Via, along the Forum and up the ascent of the Tarpeian rock to the temple of Capitoline Jove, with all Rome, massed along the way, pouring out its welcome in a roar which shook the hills, he had felt that elation of soul which recompensed for all the hardships and privations of the long and weary struggle in the dark German forests.

Impelled by the same restlessness and suspense which had drawn him from his tent on that other autumn morning—now, however, greatly accentuated by uncertainty and doubt—Fabius, from the vantage ground of an elevation beside the road, gazed earnestly in the direction of the sleeping city. Still hidden by the shadows and mists of early morning, there close at hand it rested in all its marble splendor, its power, its wealth, its frowning magnificence. In the centuries which had elapsed since Ascanius, fleeing from the disaster at Troy, had found an asylum in sunny Italy, the huts of the shepherds and the foundation of the early kings had been supplanted by the gleaming city upon its seven hills: the kings themselves had given way to the vibrant splendor of the Republic, in its turn swept aside by that other mighty force which came in with the victory at Actium. And from his imperial palace on the Palatine where Romulus had found shelter with the she-wolf, where Servius had built his wall,

and where the first Emperor erected his Hall of Justice, Caius Cæsar Caligula was enthroned as ruler of the Roman World.

It was the fact of Caligula which occasioned the doubt and distrust in the heart of the returning tribune, who rightly should have counted upon nothing but honors from the family of Germanicus. Never had any hard-fighting Roman general possessed a more devoted and efficient friend and follower than the noble son of the first Drusus had found in Publius Fabius. With his sturdy comrade Chærea—who afterwards became his brother-in-law—he had rendered invaluable services in the mutiny on the Rhine: in fact but for the fidelity and resolution of these two, probably Germanicus would not have survived that trying ordeal. Throughout all those dreadful campaigns against the barbarians, in disaster as in success the steadfast devotion, sturdy common sense and transparent sincerity of Fabius not only won for him the warm personal regard of the generous and open-minded young Prince but as well the trust and confidence of the devoted Agrippina, who was with her husband during his administration in Germany. So when after the homecoming the Senate invested Germanicus with supreme authority over all the Roman provinces in the East, as tribune of the bodyguard Fabius sailed away with his chief on the ill-fated mission to Syria.

But the oracle had not yet spoken. The skies of the future were unclouded, and again, in retrospect, the incidents of that memorable journey passed before the tribune's mind. They had stood upon the battle field of Actium. At Athens Fabius had been accorded the honor of being the only military attendant of the Prince upon his official entry of the immortal Greek City. Thence, after visiting some of the Thracian towns, they had sailed through the Propontis into the Euxine, and after a brief stop at Ilium proceeded leisurely to Antioch, their final destination. Agrippina and her children had come aboard

at Lesbos, everything had gone well, and the future opened wide its vistas of loftier accomplishments and higher preferments for his beloved leader, who with his splendid endowment of personal charm, of beauty, courage and a high demeanor already had become the idol of the Roman people.

But in Antioch were Piso and his unscrupulous wife Plancina; the former having been sent on ahead as nominal assistant to Germanicus, but under secret instructions from Tiberius as to his real mission. Suspicious from the first, Fabius had been unable to instill Germanicus with his fears. Refusing to mistrust his *adjutor*, he left Piso in full control and departed with Fabius for Egypt, where they ascended the Nile to the farthest southern limit of the Empire. At Thebes the Sacred Bull Apis had refused to eat out of the Prince's hand: that was distinctly ominous, and the oracle's warning carried where the friend's reasoning had failed. They hurried back to Antioch and found that Piso had made radical changes in the administration without the authority of Germanicus, whose suspicions now were fully aroused, and Piso was ordered to return to Rome. Full of rage, before leaving he found means to accomplish his real mission. The Prince was poisoned; and Piso, having learned that Fabius had seen the written order to commit the crime—incautiously entrusted to Plancina by Livia—the tribune knew the fate which would attend his return to Rome. None who could give such evidence against her might hope to escape the dread Augusta's vengeance if within her reach. So after bidding sorrowful farewell to Agrippina, who bearing the ashes of Germanicus and accompanied only by her children sadly re-embarked to meet her own tragic fate, Fabius began that long, weary exile which became endurable only after his marriage ten years later with a highly cultured and beautiful Greek woman of large wealth, with whom he became acquainted in Athens. Now

the gods had taken her, and he was bringing his little daughter to Rome to find a home with her aunt, the wife of Chærea, his old comrade on the Rhine.

Chærea had written him to come. Tiberius was dead, Livia was dead, the murderers of Germanicus had paid the penalty. Caligula, the son of Germanicus—whom he had held in his arms as a little boy—was Emperor, and Chærea was the tribune of his guard. Everything seemed propitious; why, then, this vague alarm which oppressed him?

In the first place, he had stopped at Colophon and the oracle had warned against impending danger. As to that alone he would take his chances: oracles sometimes limped. But this terrible Caligula—who was supposed to be mad, who was reputed to be a brute: for more than three years, as it had been told in the provinces, Rome had stood aghast at his brazen wickedness and groaned under his hated tyranny. Fabius was rich, and without friends: the Emperor was covetous, greedy and all-powerful. Fabius was no longer young, and except Chærea all his old comrades had gone out of his life. Even if any of them were still in Rome, they would be engrossed in their own anxieties. Well, although the joys of living were still keen, he was ready if the gods willed. But his child—the motherless daughter of beautiful lost Psyche—she at least must be safeguarded at whatever cost.

The old soldier sighed and started on his return to the inn. He had been musing long and when he stepped again into the roadway the morning sun began to creep over the tops of the Alban hills. As he turned toward the inn a child darted from the shrubbery, and his sombre face lightened as he held out his hands and stooped to receive her caress.

Pythias was eight years old, tall beyond her years, the beauty of her Greek mother reflected in her finely chiselled features and graceful figure, while the dominant Roman

spirit was revealed in the firm little chin, the dark luminous eyes and the air of childish resolution which her winsome manner did not entirely conceal.

"Thou hast broken thy word," she flashed at him; "thou didst promise to call me at break of day to show me thy Rome, and I've been waiting hours—*hours*," she cried, stamping her sandalled foot on the flagging.

"It is yet too early, my Pythias," he smilingly answered. "I have only been walking and thinking. See! the mists have not yet risen and the city is still hidden. But I will show it thee very soon—already they are packing the mules—run quickly to Miriam for thy milk and fruit."

The inn had long been astir, the simple morning meal was awaiting them, and directly the little cavalcade set out upon the final stage of its long journey from the East coast. Chærea had sent the chariot, the pack mules and attendants to meet them at Brundisium, and from Capua a courier had ridden in advance with word that they would arrive that morning.

As the sun rose higher, the mists dissolved, the morning chill vanished and the autumnal beauties of the Campagna were revealed. A little rain had fallen during the night, and the air was laden with the perfume of flowering shrubs and the rich odors of the damp earth. They had passed the Alban mountains with their picturesque outlines and were traversing the great plain which swept on to the city walls. The countryside was dotted with beautiful villas, the huge arches of an ancient aqueduct looming in the foreground, and the road was skirted on either side with imposing temples and innumerable tombs and columbaria—the latter becoming more numerous as they drew near the gate. Even in that day the thoroughfare over which they were passing was ancient: the glories of the Republic were in its early construction, and the splendors of the Empire had confirmed its proud title of "Queen of roads."

The child was in high spirits and chattered incessantly.

"What is my aunt like?" she asked. "And my uncle Cassius—is he old and crotchety? Will the Emperor come to meet us? Will he let me play in his gardens and make his peacocks yell and order his slaves around? Suilius told me he's got a horse who lives in an ivory stall and eats out of a gold manger. Miriam saith Rome don't amount to much, that it isn't half as nice as Athens or Jerusalem. And she saith the Roman gods are only cheap imitations of the Greek gods, and that the god of the Hebrews looks down on them all."

Fabius listened in amazement and glared at the old nurse, who averted her eyes, as he sternly replied:

"Miriam had best keep Jerusalem and the Hebrew god to herself and leave others to tell thee of Rome and its gods. As for the Emperor"—lowering his voice and with a distrustful glance at the Roman attendants—"curb thy pert tongue or thou wilt find to thy sorrow that the real god of Rome lives in the palace of Cæsar."

"I'm not afraid," Pythias declared, with a toss of her bright head. "They say he's cruel and wicked, but I guess he don't eat little girls. Anyway my Aunt Lucia wrote that I could have a dog," and she slipped her hand in his and smiled archly.

"It is well to be brave, but thou must be careful too," he answered, smiling in turn. But his face became grave. He had long known—and in a way rejoiced in the fact—that the child had spirit. But so had the noble Agrippina. When the gods turn their backs, it is sometimes safer to be commonplace. Well, the die was cast, as the Great Cæsar declared: having crossed the Rubicon and sunk his boats behind him he must see the thing through.

And now the city loomed before them, with the ancient Porta Capena close at hand. Outside the gate, with two prætorian guards behind him, stood a tall man in full military attire, his grey hair and the deep lines of his face indicating the years of toilsome service behind, and

in a moment they were greeting Cassius Chærea, who cried in his high-pitched voice:

"By Jupiter, Fabius, it is good to see thee at last! Almost I believed thou hadst been waylaid and killed—except that today Rome claims a monopoly in such things. And this is little Pythias? Hercules! When Cæsar sees that face and heareth the name, he'll want her among the Greek boys who are to perform in his new theatre," and he laughed boisterously. "But come along to my carriage and we'll leave the prætorians to follow with the child and the slaves in the crawling way which thou appearest to prefer as much as I dislike it. Besides, when the sun is overhead, I am due at the palace; and if Cæsar should call and I not answer—pouff! off goes my head"—with an expressive gesture, at which Pythias stared wide-eyed.

"Would it really happen, Uncle?" said she.

"Well, it *might*," he replied, "and that would be too bad—thinkest thou not so, little one?"

"It would be dreadful," the child answered solemnly; and after a moment's thought, "Did Aunt Lucia get my dog? If thou art late and really afraid of Cæsar, thou hadst better take him with thee," she said demurely.

Chærea looked sharply at her.

"How old art thou?" he asked abruptly.

"I am eight," said Pythias.

"Well, if thou desirest to live to be nine, when Cæsar is spoken of, better hold thy tongue"; and her uncle turned and led Fabius to where his horses were prancing. After they had rolled away, Pythias bombarded Miriam with questions, but the latter had received her lesson and refused to talk. A slight frown gathered on the smooth white brow of the child. What was behind it all? First her father and now her uncle had warned her about Cæsar. If he were so bad, why did the gods let him stay? Or were the gods themselves no good, as Miriam declared? Well, maybe her aunt would know; she would find out anyway. And then she gave all her attention to the tur-

moil which engulfed them as they turned from the old military road into a broad street which swept around the Palatine.

In joining Chærea, Fabius had not been averse to the opportunity for that confidential chat with his sister's husband upon the outcome of which so much depended.

"And what of Lucia?" he asked at once: "she is well?"

Chærea's face fell as he replied,

"She is poorly indeed. She seldom goes out—no decent woman in Rome cares to go out. But there are few decent women left for that matter. She hath never been well since the lady Agrippina died. I feared you might not come in time: it will not be long at best."

Fabius could not repress a start.

"You never wrote me," he said reproachfully. "I ought not to have brought the child. What will become of her now?"

"What would become of her if left in Athens?" the other rejoined carelessly; "we have slaves and freed-women here, as yonder."

"But it is someone to take the place of her mother I came to find," said Fabius earnestly. "Already thou hast observed her beauty. What can a slave do to prepare and safeguard her against the dangers she must face?"

"By Castor and Pollux," said Chærea, "the slaves in Rome are quite as good as most of the other women. There are few Pomponias; the dangers of being virtuous are too great—even such as really are so must pretend otherwise if they would survive. But why art thou surprised?" observing his brother-in-law's shocked expression: "thou hast heard all about this vile brute in Cæsar's palace"; and as Fabius glanced apprehensively at the driver his brother-in-law continued:

"Have no concern; he's not only a mute—he's stone deaf. 'Little Boots' made him so, and in a moment of drunken fear gave him to me, lest I be spied upon to Cæsar's harm"—and he laughed bitterly. "But then let

it rest; doubtless Lucia hath some plan. She hath talked with the lady Pomponia about it. Besides," he added darkly, "Cæsar can't live forever. And here is Rome indeed"—spreading wide his hands—"see what thou hast missed, old comrade, these twenty years gone!" and he bowed to a handsome woman who stared boldly at them from a passing litter. "'Tis Messalina, the wife of Claudius," he explained to Fabius.

The swift-moving carriage, drawn by a couple of active ponies, which shortly after leaving the gate had turned into a broad street lying between the Palatine and the lower slope of the Cælian, swung sharply toward the west and drew up where two litters, each manned by six powerful slaves wearing the palace liveries, awaited them. Just ahead was the crowded Forum where horses were not allowed; in fact at that period driving in a carriage was forbidden generally in Rome on account of the narrowness and crookedness of the streets.

And now the Sacra Via, flanked by an array of stately edifices on either side, after a gentle descent to the right, stretched away straight before them through the heart of Rome. On the south the temple of Apollo and the palaces of Augustus, Tiberius and Caligula massed the entire length of the Palatine ridge; other imposing structures lay along the slopes of the Esquiline on the north, while in front uprose the ragged wall of the Capitoline, its further summit crowned by the Arx, the mighty temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus overlooking the spur formed by the Tarpeian Rock. Past the shops, the shrines, the Basilicas, the rostra, the temple of Jupiter Stator, the Atrium of the Vestals and all those wonderful creations in marble which crowded the ancient area, slowly they worked their way through the throng, with which at this hour in the day the Forum was congested, finally to emerge at the extreme northwest corner upon the Clivus Argentarius. As they passed the dreaded *carcer*—the Mamertine prison of later times—which frowned menacingly on

the left, Chærea jocularly observed: "I will not leave thee here this time, Fabius!"

Climbing the steep ridge which at that period united the Capitoline and Esquiline hills, the Argentarius was the only direct traffic connection between the Forum and the great Flaminian Way, which extended two hundred miles north of the city. At the point where the Clivus pitched over the crest and down to the ancient Porta Ratumena, the litters turned into a badly paved lane which bore to the left, and winding round the hill brought up at the tribune's home. Here the lane ended in a precipitous footpath which zigzagged down as far as the old Servian wall.

For a time after the downfall of the Republic a few private houses still clung to the slopes of the Capitoline, towards the Velabrum and the Campus Martius. One of these dwellings had come down to the tribune from his ancestors, who were of the old plebeian aristocracy. Facing northwest, it commanded a broad view of the Campus Martius and of the hills beyond the right bank of the encircling Tiber. At the south of the *domus* was a garden, sheltered on two sides by high walls, with the hill at its back, and thus completely enclosed.

As they passed from the vestibule through the outer entrance, a long-haired puppy chained in one of the *cellæ* leaped the length of its tether and barked joyously, to the delight of the grinning janitor.

"In the name of all the gods she really hath gotten a dog for the child!" cried Chærea. "It is plain who is to rule this house from now on."

In the atrium a slender woman with snow-white hair was awaiting them. She stood erect, her eyes were bright, the tones of her voice were strong—there was even a faint color in her cheeks; and as she greeted him with all of the old charm which he remembered so well, a great wave of relief surged through the heart of Fabius: assuredly the tribune was wrong!

“And Pythias”—she said eagerly—“surely thou hast not disappointed me?”

“Be easy,” replied her husband: “I brought Fabius with me through the Forum—he was pining for a sight of the *domus* Caligula! The others cannot be long behind us. Priscus will take the short way by the great Circus and over the Tuscus, where the litters are waiting, and the imp will drive him: she is full of fire and is itching to see that long-haired brute thou hast chained at the door. By Pallas, and he were Acteon’s Theridamus, instead of a simple-minded puppy, I would be minded to follow her advice and take him to the palace to see if he fitted his name: a ‘Beast Tamer’ is what Rome most doth need”—and he laughed loudly. “Tell Lucia about it,” he said to Fabius: “I myself must hasten. I hope to return at evening. Make him welcome Lucia—and hark! they are coming,” and he hastened back to his litter.

They heard the gleeful cries of the child as she saw the straining puppy, which whimpered and yelped with joy under her caresses. Then the two came into the atrium pell-mell, and the stern-faced Roman turned his face as Lucia, with overflowing eyes, dropped to her knees and gathered Pythias to her breast. The gods had been good to him. Let Cæsar rage as he might now the child was safe: and he strode into the garden as his sister led Pythias and Miriam to the room which had been provided for them.

II

AN EVENING ON THE CAPITOLINE

TOWARD the end of the same afternoon, accompanied by the centurion, who had been left by Chærea for the purpose, Fabius and Pythias set out for a climb to the summit of the Capitoline, that splendid vantage point for a comprehensive view of the imperial city—the child scarcely more eager than her father for the excursion.

On the side of the hill where Chærea lived there was no way to the summit; all the approaches were on the south-east, towards the Forum. Accordingly, they walked back to the Argentarius and followed it as far as the Mamertine prison, just to the south of which the Scalæ Gemoniæ, deviating from the Comitium, began its tortuous ascent. As they approached the *carcer* the centurion observed,

“The prefect of the prison is an old soldier who served with Germanicus. The tribune Chærea esteems him: he may be known to the noble Fabius also. And the little lady would like to see the *carcer*.”

“Ah!” said Fabius, bending a shrewd glance at Pythias. “And didst thou conjure up this fine tale of the keeper?”

“I do want to see the prison, but the tale is true,” she answered. “And if there was a poor old soldier of mine close by, I would not be too proud to greet him.”

“Go, Priscus,” said Fabius grimly, “and learn if the prefect is on duty.”

The centurion returned directly, preceded by a kind of bearded giant with grizzled hair, keen dark eyes and a rough but not unkindly face, who eyed Fabius sharply.

For a moment the latter stared in return, then thrusting out his hand cried heartily:

“’Tis Rufus in the flesh. By Bacchus, I am glad to see thee: dost not remember me?”

“The tribune Fabius!” cried the other in amazement. “Now will I pour a libation to the gods in the first wine shop I enter. Open the door,” he bellowed over his shoulder. “Bring him in, Priscus, and even Cæsar himself shall not set him free until I say the word,” he shouted jovially.

Fabius laughed:

“It were pleasanter in the forests of the barbarians, old fighter, than in thy gloomy *carcer*. But this little one of mine is in Rome for the first time and wants to see everything: indeed, but for her planning, I should have passed thee by unwitting. Is there harm in her coming in?”

“She would not be safer in the temple of Mater Magna,” replied Rufus, as he summoned a guard. “Go thou also, Priscus—and let not so much as a spot of dust, or even a shadow, fall upon her or I’ll throw thee both in the Tullianum. Come now, my captain, and tell me all. Jupiter Ammon, but thy coming hath gladdened me: I thought thou hadst died with Germanicus. That false Piso: I helped drag his body to the Tiber. Wert thou banished by Tiberius, that thou didst not come back to Rome?” and he led Fabius into an inner room, where they chatted confidentially until Pythias returned.

“I have seen everything,” she announced airily. “We went down into the Tullianum and it is dark and very nasty and full of spiders. And I saw where they killed the children of Sejanus; the little girl cried and asked what harm she had done when they dragged her in there—they were wicked men and I don’t believe thou wouldst have let them do it,” and she looked up at Rufus with quivering lips.

Fabius started violently, while the prefect’s features contracted in rage as he turned savagely on the guard, and thundered:

"Fool, why didst thou tell her? Thy name shall go to Cæsar to-night unless"—and he strode towards him menacingly with brawny arm upraised.

The man was in deadly peril, but before he could speak—perhaps he would not have spoken—Pythias burst out:

"It was not his fault—I knew about it before we came, and when I asked he tried to make me believe it wasn't true—didn't he, Priscus?" appealing earnestly to the centurion, who answered, "I heard it all, Rufus; 'tis as she saith."

The prefect's face cleared and the fire went out of his eyes.

"I am glad," he said simply; and turning to Fabius, "I have trusted him above the others and, as thou seest, he is not to blame."

"If any is to blame it is I, Rufus," replied the other: "it is no place to bring a child—let us go," and Fabius shuddered as he turned toward the door.

"Goodby," said Pythias, laying her little hand in the huge fist of Rufus: "I don't like thy dark prison, but I have made up my mind how I shall get out if they ever bring *me* here."

"No one who is sent here ever gets out, little one," said the prefect grimly: "the only way to escape from the *carcer* is to do so before thou art sent here! May the gods keep thee, noble Fabius," and they hurried out into the sunlight, Pythias smiling prettily in response to the grateful look in the eyes of the guard as he opened the gate.

"Who told thee?" said Fabius in a low voice, after the gate clanged behind them.

"'Twas Miriam," replied the child: "I heard her talking with old Prisca while fixing my hair."

"Always that Jewish woman," he muttered wrathfully. He was never to know that in the occurrence at the prison, occasioned by the indiscretion of a slave woman and now so deplored by him, it was destined that in the years to

come his beloved child should find her only possible way of escape from the same horrible fate as that which had befallen the innocent daughter of Sejanus.

But now they were climbing the steps cut out of the tufa of the hill. After reaching the level between the two summits, they turned to the right and toiled up the flight of the *Scalæ Monetæ*, to the site of the ancient *Arx* on the pinnacle. Below them the city extended on three sides—hemmed in at the west by the winding ribbon of the Tiber which shimmered and sparkled on its way to the sea. Breathless with delight, the child gazed in wonder at the wide-spread panorama, while Fabius, seated on a fallen block from the ruined temple of Juno, watched her in contented silence. Then, under her questioning, he told her of the beginning and growth of the city, traced the course of the Servian wall which once encircled it, and named in their order the far-famed hills upon which it rested. He showed her where the Camp of the *Prætorians* lay over beyond the Esquiline, pointed out the beautiful Hill of Gardens, flashing in the October sunshine toward the north, the Triumphal Gate, with its bridge across the Tiber, at the west, the splendid marble structures erected by the first Emperor on the *Campus Martius* below them.

The child listened intently. She was precocious, and pleased by her quick apprehension and manifest interest, instead of returning by the rocky stairway, Fabius sent Priscus back for a litter to meet them at the other end of the hill, and crossed the Asylum to the temple of the Capitoline Jove. Pythias stared in awe at the immense structure, with its massive columns, its pediment surmounted by the quadriga of Jupiter, its roof supported by huge eagles and covered with gilded tiles which blazed in the sunlight. Her wonder grew when her father pointed out that the temple itself was only the nucleus of a bewildering mass of shrines, trophies, altars and other structures, which almost covered the area.

Passing through the enclosing wall by the *Pandana*

Gate opposite the ancient temple of Fides, they followed a path which led to the summit of the Tarpeian rock. Here the false vestal, who gave her name to the cliff, was burned; and here the sacred geese awakened Manlius by their cackling to save the city from the Gauls, as Fabius explained. Here also, old Prisca had told her, other shocking things happened; as to which, however, recalling the scene in the prison, Pythias discreetly remained silent.

In the depth below them, to the left, the crowds had begun to assemble in that part of the Forum protected from the sun by the beetling rock; at the other side, toward the Tiber, they looked down into the Forum Boarium, from which another steep footpath—the Centum Gradus—fought its way up the cliffs to a gate in the area wall behind them. Directly opposite rose the Palatine, covered with Cæsar's palaces and temples. From the northeast corner of the hill an aerial bridge spanned the Clivus Victoriæ: another extended from the roof of the Temple of Augustus across the Vicus Tuscus, and a third from that of the Basilica Julia crossed the Vicus Jugarius to the temple of Saturn just below them—together constituting the famous "Bridge of Caligula," which Fabius himself looked upon for the first time. By thus utilizing the roofs of the intervening structures, the Emperor was enabled to hold familiar intercourse with the Capitoline Jove without making the long descent from the Palatine into the Forum and the corresponding ascent of the Clivus. Beyond the Palatine rose the long ridge of the Cælian, its temples, palaces, theatres and heaps of nameless ruins standing out in the level rays of the setting sun; between it and the Aventine on the south they could see the Via Appia stretching away through its bordering tombs into the crimson and gold of the beautiful Campagna. Was it indeed only yesterday they had traversed it? It seemed æons ago!

But the sun was fast sinking behind Vaticanus, and the great gate, which gave issue to the only carriage road leading to the Capitol, was closed at night. Hurrying

back into the area, they crossed to the northeast entrance, guarded by a watchman and several huge dogs. Here the centurion was waiting with the litter. Zigzagging down the hill, the roar from the Forum, now packed from end to end with a surging mass, growing louder and louder each moment of the descent, near the temple of Saturn they emerged upon the Sacra Via, swung around into the Clivus Argentarius and after passing the old *carcer*, dark and forbidding in the deepening twilight, turned at last into the quiet lane which led to the tribune's house.

It was almost dark when they arrived. Lucia was in the vestibule, with Miriam and the straining dog who yelped with delight as Pythias jumped out of the litter. "Don't tell her about the *carcer*," whispered Fabius. She nodded intelligently, and ran to her aunt, who clasped her close as she said reproachfully, "How couldst thou keep her out so late, Publius? I have been so anxious."

"Oh, Aunt, it was splendid!" Pythias cried. "We've had such a beautiful time. I saw the hut where Romulus lived, and the trophies my father's Cæsar set up near the great temple. And I'm glad I'm a Roman: I am going to live here when I grow up, and have a house on top of the Capitol—or maybe I'll live in the palace so I can cross over Cæsar's bridge," she added mischievously.

Lucia blanched, but before she could speak Fabius turned the subject adroitly by asking:

"Where is Cassius? I thought he would meet us."

"He sent word that he could not come until midday tomorrow," his sister replied sadly; "that troubled me also."

"'Tis all in a soldier's life, my Lucia," he replied cheerfully. "But come, I am famished and athirst; I long for a cup of Chærea's sparkling Falernian. Pythias, dost smell the chickens cooking in the kitchen? Pay the litter bearers, Priscus, and join thy comrades at the wine shop: thou hast guarded us nobly," and he placed some money in the hand of the pleased centurion and followed the others into the house.

III

“THE GREATEST AND BEST CÆSAR”

ALTHOUGH he had promised to return on the morrow at midday, the long afternoon had almost passed before Chærea arrived. He was in bad humor, and explained his delay with undisguised temper. Early in the day he had accompanied Caligula to the Circus which the Emperor was constructing near the gardens of Agrippina, beyond the Tiber. Notwithstanding the extreme heat, Cæsar had stayed most of the day, watching the slow transportation of the immense obelisk he had brought from Heliopolis, for which a foundation had been laid in the *spina* or middle line of the course, at an equal distance from the two end goals. On the way home a wheel of the chariot had given out, and although the mishap was entirely outside the scope of Chærea's responsibility, he had been savagely upbraided by Caligula. But there had been a recompense: on reaching the palace Cæsar angrily bade him begone. Fearful of what may have been an evil portent, doubtless already “Little Boots” had drunk himself into a stupor of forgetfulness. Sabinus, the other tribune, was at the palace; and he, Chærea, would not return until the next day—no, not if the spears in the temple of Mars should fall, as he declared with emphasis.

“Coming through the Tuscus I met the Senator Plautius, on his way to a bookshop in the Argiletum. He said Pomponia comes to-morrow, and she will bring the young Antonia to see Pythias. She is the daughter of Claudius”—and observing the slight frown on the face of Fabius, “Be not alarmed: if Pomponia vouches for her,

she is fit to be a vestal. But there is more," he continued. "In front of the *carcer* I overtook Asiaticus chatting with old Rufus. He is stopping a few days at his villa in the gardens, and bade me bring thee to sup with him to-night. It will be the coolest place in Rome, and I promised willingly. Priscus has gone for the litters, so let us hasten"; and they sought the *cubicula*, in preparation for the bath.

Following the Argentarius down to the Forum of Julius Cæsar, they turned to the right through the Forum of Augustus and skirting the Quirinal by a street which bore in the general direction of Agrippa's Aqueduct, approached the southwest slope of the Collis Hortorum. The wonderful gardens with which the genius of Mæcenas had covered practically the entire hill, formerly a public burial place, attained their climax in loveliness at the corner nearest the Tiber. Originally established at this point by Lucullus, they had been extended and adorned in a style of unexampled magnificence by the present owner, endowed with the happy combination of culture, taste and unlimited wealth.

Asiaticus, born at Vienne in Gaul, where he still had numerous and powerful connections, and consul under Tiberius, was noted for his courage and independence, and was deservedly popular. And as Chærea cynically observed to his brother-in-law, the gods alone knew how anyone possessed of such attributes, especially when emphasized by great wealth, could have escaped the maw of the greedy and covetous tiger on the Palatine. Asiaticus was waiting in the vestibule when the litters arrived.

"Greetings to the friend of Germanicus," he said graciously, extending one hand to Fabius—"and to you, my friend," giving the other to the tribune. "It is kindly of you to take pity on my solitude. I will pour a libation to Apollo in gratitude for the sunshine which your coming brings"; and he led the way through a colonnaded portico into a magnificent atrium which in beauty and richness of

construction and decoration probably was unsurpassed, even in that era of luxury and extravagance, by any other private house in Rome. In the center was a superb fountain composed of a group of Naiads, chiselled from Parian marble, rising from a widespread bowl of alabaster which served as the impluvium. Overhead a purple cloth was stretched across the opening to ward off the sun's rays and the heat. Columns of highly polished marble, resting on gilded bases, supported the inner edges of the roof on either side; the walls were ornamented with brilliant frescoes, while the floor was made of segments of alabaster, framed in enamel of many delicate shadings. Precious vases, in which plants and flowering shrubs were growing, were grouped about the columns, and the open spaces were filled with bronze and marble statues, including those of the *Dei Majores*.

After pausing a moment to admire a rarely beautiful statue of Vesta of Greek workmanship, which Asiaticus explained had just been set in place as the last of the twelve greater deities, they passed through a corridor alongside the tablinum into an inner atrium, smaller but more beautiful even than the other, and thence into the summer dining room. This room, forming a wing in itself, faced the north, with windows on the east and west, having panes of translucent marble instead of glass, removable to catch whatsoever air might be stirring from either quarter. The floor was of the beautiful yellow marble—*giallo antico*—so justly admired; the walls were veneered with crusts of black slate, covered with graceful arabesques in gold leaf, and the ceiling, slightly vaulted, was panelled in marble of a delicate rose color, at the center inlaid with the rarest specimens of alabastrine agate to form a charmingly elusive figure of the goddess of love and beauty. Otherwise the apartment was free of adornment, a subtle appeal to the effectiveness of which was emitted by the air laden with the perfume of choicest autumn flowers and stirred by the tinkle of unseen spouting waters.

Around the three façades of the wing a wide veranda extended, the roof supported by fluted columns of African marble. There was no balustrade, but at the outer edges of the tessellated pavement, which extended to the green-sward, marble boxes and urns filled with rare plants were grouped between the columns about which vines clambered, creeping along the cornices, drooping in rich clusters around the alabaster lamps and lacing around the copper chains by which they were suspended.

The supper—actually a dinner, the *cena* of the Romans—passed gaily. Reclining upon luxurious couches—Fabius occupying the seat of honor at the right-hand corner of the one in the middle—at three sides of the low massive table made of thuja root and Delian bronze, they were served by quiet-moving slaves who came and went through a doorway hidden behind a mass of flowering plants. Refined by nature and keenly alive to the beautiful, Fabius yielded readily to the charm of the situation, set off by the friendliness and easy courtesy of their host. Chærea, less cultured and reflective than the others, responded rather to the appeal of the well-cooked food and the choice wines, and his spirits rose perceptibly with each cup of the chilled Cæcuban which he quaffed. With loud laughter he recounted the episode of the chariot wheel and its consequences, of which now he saw the humorous side, and accepted good-naturedly the ex-consul's bantering on his "slavish subserviency." Asiaticus told of an oration on liberty he had listened to that day in the Forum by a Greek philosopher who finally had been driven from the rostrum by an unsympathetic audience; and then led Fabius to talk of his life in the East and of his memorable journeyings with the young prince.

When the meal was finished and they had been sprinkled with perfume and wreathed with flowers, they went out upon the west veranda where a light breeze was stirring. The full moon had risen, its mellow beams illuminating the beautiful marble tomb of the Domitii on the brow of the

hill to the right, and flooding with its radiance the long slope from the Gardens of Sallust behind them to the woodland border on the broad Flaminian Way below. Further to the west the Tiber glistened like polished silver—on its left bank, directly opposite, the huge mausoleum of Augustus, crowned with verdure, and surmounted by its towering statue of the first Emperor, looming above the dark arches of the *Aqua Virgo*, now softened to pearly gray.

The witchery of the garden was enhanced in that its beauties were only partially revealed in the moonlight. Paths spread with yellow golden sand led off in every direction under arbors and ivy-covered trellises; artificial ponds, winding in and out of the shadows, glimmered furtively where their placid surfaces caught the silvery waves of light; through vistas in the trees and shrubbery, marble statues gleamed white against their background of ilexes and cypresses, while the soft air vibrated to the sound of running brooks and tinkling waterfalls.

Fabius stood as if enchanted, while even the unimagina-tive tribune stared in wonder.

“By all the gods, Asiaticus,” he cried, “and all this were mine, here would I stay always, instead of wasting half my life in stupid Gaul.”

“Sometimes there are considerations other than those of personal choice. It is conceivable that Rome doth not yield in attractions to Antioch and the East; yet Fabius, Roman born, hath found it otherwise,” the ex-Consul replied meaningly.

“I served Germanicus—not Tiberius,” said Fabius with a smile.

“And I, Tiberius—not Caligula,” the other rejoined with emphasis.

A look of intelligence passed between the speakers, but Chærea seemed puzzled: “What meanest thou?” he said with a slight frown.

“I mean,” said Asiaticus deliberately, “that with all his

faults Tiberius never stamped on those who left him alone nor destroyed from vulgar greed or the bare lust of killing. But for the Augusta, he would have been a great Emperor, to-day Germanicus would be on the Palatine, whilst thou and Fabius might be living unafraid in beautiful villas of thine own. But the madman, the brute, the monster whose bread thou dost eat and whose gold thou dost take, hath set out to exterminate virtue itself—with a preference for the virtuous rich; so that it is prudent for one like myself not to be always in the way.”

The tribune's eyes flashed, as he cried wrathfully:

“Asiaticus, thou shalt pay for this. *Perpol*—but are we alone?” dropping his voice and glancing nervously about.

“Thou mayst speak freely,” the other answered: “the slaves have gone to the kitchens, there is a tried freedman from the Rhine in the room behind us, Hector the mute is in the prothyrum with the wolf hound, and at each end of the veranda are trained watchdogs who will sound alarm at the lightest footfall, or the faintest moving shadows.”

“See what Rome hath come to in these shameful days,” cried Chærea scornfully, “when such precautions must be taken if one would speak above a whisper in his own house! But come, let us have it out: now I see why we were bidden,” and he smiled grimly.

“I may not deny it,” Asiaticus replied seriously. “Long have I known thy courage and probity—thou knewest I did but jest a moment since—and when Rufus told me the trusted friend of Germanicus was with thee, I saw the chance to free my mind for once. To-morrow I leave for Gaul. My Lucia fears for me and vows by *Magna Mater* she never will set foot in Rome again. She begs me not to come—but 'tis in the blood: the moth is powerless to stay away from the flame. Sooner or later it will consume me—and both of you are walking as it were on ashes that hide the fire beneath.”

“Now thou speakest like the oracle,” calmly rejoined

Chærea, while Fabius nodded his assent. That were an oracle indeed whose utterances should forecast the future so accurately. In three short months Chærea was consumed by the flame, in whose smoke Fabius had vanished forever. As for Asiaticus, gazing intently while he spoke at a marble group of the Parcæ in a moonlit opening, it chanced that his eyes were fixed upon the very spot where his own funeral pyre was to be ignited by the imperial torch.

"Tell him," at length said Chærea savagely, waving his hand toward Fabius; "perchance thou mayest convince him—me he will not heed."

"In truth, it is hard to believe a son of Germanicus and Agrippina can be so evil," said Fabius. "Often in the camp where he was born we carried him in our arms: 'twas Chærea himself who first called him Caligula, from the little army boots he wore. He was a bold, winsome boy of eight when I saw him last, at the time his father died. Of late, indeed, ugly rumor came; but at a distance it is hard to judge, and the legionaries would have none of it."

"'Tis the same with the army in Gaul, and the prætorians will tolerate no word against him; that hath been the final curse," said Asiaticus. Then a sudden rush of anger mastered him, his reserve vanished, and casting all self-control to the winds, he jumped to his feet and began disclaiming passionately:

"Never was Rome so utterly debased as under this mad and filthy tyrant in Cæsar's palace: the Tarquins themselves were less abominable. Better a thousand times the blow at Pompey's statue had never fallen: had Brutus foreseen, Cæsar would have received from him a crown instead of a dagger stroke. Consider, Fabius, what Rome hath witnessed and suffered in the four years since this degenerate son of Germanicus threw aside the mask," he cried, as he tramped up and down, his dark features distorted with the long-suppressed rage which had finally burst its bounds.

“Tiberius, misled by Macro, named his supposedly austere nephew to share the succession with his grandson, Gemellus. The crafty Caius induced the Senate to set aside the will and then had himself proclaimed. He won the prætorians by lavish gifts from the public funds, the Senate by promising to share his power with them, the populace by nominally restoring the elections. Then nothing happened but slaughter, licentiousness and a savage onslaught upon all that was worth saving to the State. Every man of good reputation upon whom he could lay his hands hath perished: Sabinus, because his wife watched soldiers drilling at a military post; Secundus, because he delivered a speech against tyrants; the Governor in Germany, because the soldiers liked him; Junius Priscus, because he was wealthy; Græcinus, because he refused to impeach Silanus, who thereupon was put to death solely on account of his virtue. Seneca, who had committed the monstrous crime of speaking well in the Senate while Caligula was present, escaped because he had consumption and was expected to die anyway; while the really infamous Tigellinus was merely banished. Of the thousands slain, some met their fate in prison, some were forced to fight as gladiators, others were flung to the beasts or hurled from the Capitoline, or in despair opened their own veins. ‘How I wish they had a single neck!’ the tiger snarled, watching a glut of bodies floating in the Tiber.

“The palace is filled with panderers, the magistrates dare not even meet, much less act, without the tyrant’s permission; the charioteers and gladiators who rule him plunder openly under the protection of the janissaries he has installed on the Cælian. Liberty, patriotism, virtue, decency, respect for the gods—he has blotted them out alike. He murdered Tiberius to get the purple, slaughtered Gemellus to retain it, poisoned his aged mother when she sought to restrain him from dishonoring Drusilla, and banished his sisters under an infamous charge in order to

confiscate their wealth. Such is the virtuous son of Agrippina, who proclaims himself ‘The Best and Greatest Cæsar’ of whom thou canst believe no ill, Fabius—and this is the proud Rome which is to be preferred to Antioch or Gaul. Is it not the truth, Chærea?”

“’Tis true enough so far as it goes,” stolidly replied the other. “Thou mightst have told how he forced his own sister into the palace as his wife, where she died of shame. Nor hast thou spoken of Orestilla, whom he took from Piso when the marriage ceremony was scarce completed, and then divorced her to marry Paullina, the wife of Regulus, who himself was compelled to betroth her to divine Cæsar—‘in order that the law should be observed!’ And then his latest spouse, the shameless Cæsonia, once a vulgar woman of the street, now the deified Augusta! ’Tis pity thou wert not here, Fabius,” he continued with a sneer; “Cæsar had us all to a feast, proclaimed himself Jupiter Latialis, and Cæsonia the high priestess; introduced her first wearing the purple, then bade her disrobe that all might understand how even Jove were unable to resist her charms!”

Fabius stared in silent horror. “But the people,” at length he cried, “the Quirites—the Consul fathers—if all this be true——”

“There are no longer Quirites,” Asiaticus interrupted: “there are but two classes left in Rome—the soldiers and the slaves. As for the Consuls—well, Caius hath built a marble stall on the Palatine for his horse Incitatus, who eats from an ivory manger, wears purple trappings and hath an official guard; and thy Germanicus declares Incitatus shall be the next Consul! Doubtless he will make as good a magistrate as any of the others,” and he laughed sourly.

“Better than many I grant you,” Chærea broke in. “There is old Pomponious; he supped at the palace the other night and while stuffing greedily at Cæsar’s feet was always bending over to shower them with kisses. San-

guinius, who got the appointment as reward for pandering while prefect of the city, is even worse. By Pollux, 'twould be better for Rome to be kicked into submission by the heels of Incitatus than to be trampled by this servile crew."

"And yet I cannot understand," mused Fabius. "Methinks the plebs at least would rebel. And always Rome hath had its conspirators."

"But for the prætorians, who like thee worship Germanicus, long since he would have been dragged down the Gemonian stairs," coldly replied Asiaticus. "Here and there may be some Brutus under cover, but even such chooseth not to strike"—with a flaming glance at the tribune, whose sullen face grew darker. "As for conspiracies, there was Pompedius, and that brave Quintilla the tribune himself had on the rack——"

"By the shades of all who have gone to Pluto," Chærea shrieked wildly, "and he had ordered one more turn of the screw, I would have struck; never death hovered so close as when the vile coward sneered at my compassion and pleading for the poor girl: Quintilla herself knew it. Why not play the part thyself, Asiaticus?"

"Softly, Chærea, I meant no reflection and truly think the time is not ripe. To kill mad Cæsar is only a step, which easily may lead nowhere—as Brutus proved. Caligula dead, upon whom would the purple fall? In the line of Julius are left only the Silani, all too young and yet unproved, while of the other branch Claudius is the last. There may be some good in this brother of Germanicus, but at best he is slow-witted and weak, and is bound to be ruined by that profligate he last married. To restore the Republic is the only way out—and I am too old to undertake so great an enterprise. I may but hope to point the advance and perchance live to cry 'Io' when the triumph is accorded. And as the gods hear me, Chærea, I have come to believe that it is thou who shalt give the signal!"

“Come, Fabius, let us be gone,” cried the tribune roughly as he rose to his feet. “If I listen more to this mad dreamer, before another sun either I shall be Cæsar—or floating down the Tiber: and, as he saith, the time is not ripe. Go back to Gaul and declaim to the legions as thou hast talked to-night, Asiaticus; but return quickly if thou wouldst be acclaimed with us—or be accursed with us, as the event may prove.”

“May the gods protect thee, Chærea—and thee, Fabius,” said the ex-Consul feelingly. “Mayhap we shall meet in brighter days—but if otherwise, all are old soldiers and know how to die.”

It was long after midnight when the litters wound their way homeward, the crest of the Capitoline on ahead bathed in refulgent splendor, the city sleeping restlessly above and below them. No word had been spoken since they left the villa; but when the bearers had gone, as they started toward the house, Fabius laid a restraining hand upon the tribune’s arm, and with a troubled look said earnestly:

“Thou art not forgetting Lucia and the child?”

“It is in no small measure because of them I shall play my part,” he answered doggedly. “‘Sooner or later,’ as the Consul said”—and with an angry gesture towards the palace and a bitter imprecation, he passed on.

THE ORACLE FULFILLED

THREE months had passed when Asiaticus returned to Rome. Immediately upon his arrival, he sent a letter to Chærea urging him to come at once to the villa, but his messenger reported that he found no one at the tribune's home except the guardian, a mute, from whom he was unable to gain any information.

Not a little disquieted, Asiaticus slept badly, and early the following day he went himself to the Capitoline, but with even less result: the house appeared to be unoccupied. His fears now actively aroused, after a moment's indecision he resolved to seek Claudius, as the most promising and least dangerous source of information. Under his sharp command to hasten, the litter bearers moved rapidly through the Clivus into the Forum and at the summit of the Sacra Via turned into the Vicus Apollinis which led up to the palace.

Of uncouth appearance and irresolute by nature, Claudius had never been regarded favorably by his relatives; while the Roman world in general, entirely given over to the handsome and popular Germanicus, considered the younger and less-favored brother almost an idiot. He had been passed over in the succession as matter of course. For a brief period after Caius was proclaimed, as uncle of Cæsar he was accorded some recognition, notably the consulship, a dignity never before enjoyed by him although then nearly fifty years old. But he was denied reëlection, and his only subsequent honor—that of appointment as one of the priests of the self-deified Emperor—would have been foregone gladly, involving as it did the

burden of a heavy payment to the imperial purse. Claudius was poor and his entire estate was swallowed up by the assessment.

Reduced to dependence upon his nephew's bounty, he occupied a small wing in the palace of Augustus, where serenely unmindful of the almost universal contempt in which he was held, he lived contentedly with Messalina and his children: Octavia, then three years old, and Antonia, nearly twelve, the child of his third spouse, Ælia Petina.

It was otherwise with his wife. Young, beautiful, vivacious and inclined to luxury and extravagance of every sort, she cherished the ambitions and desires naturally to be expected in one who inherited through a double line the distempers of the Julian blood, and was only awaiting a favorable opportunity to claim that place in the sun she both craved and considered herself entitled to.

The measure of the ex-Consul's antipathy to Messalina if anything exceeded that of his contempt for her husband: of which fact the shrewd young beauty was well aware. But while too proud to conceal their mutual aversion, for the time being each was content to await the moment when either self-interest or other compelling reason should occasion an open breach. Such an event was inevitable in a clash between natures so spirited and unscrupulous on one side, so resolute and lofty on the other: in their case it was destined to constitute a veritable tragedy.

Although it was midwinter, the day was mild and balmy, and Claudius and his wife were sitting on a little paved terrace which overlooked a garden enclosure toward the south where some children and slave girls were romping in the warm sunshine. From Claudius, to whom any visit was an event, the ex-Consul received a boisterous greeting: while even Messalina, temporarily barred from the social excitements she craved, seemed not ill-pleased at his coming. After a few commonplaces, Asiaticus adroitly led the conversation to Chærea, observing he had been told his home was closed.

“Didst not know that his wife died?” said Claudius; and observing the other’s manifest surprise continued: “It was two weeks since, just after Fabius left. At her request all of their slaves were manumitted, and after the funeral the tribune closed the house and has since resided in the palace.”

“And Fabius,” carelessly inquired the other as he picked up a ball from the terrace and threw it back into the garden. “Where did he go? He told me he was tired of the East and had come home to die.”

“Then perchance what he came for hath happened,” observed Messalina dryly, at which Claudius paled and looked troubled; “at any rate he hath gone—perhaps ‘disappeared’ would be the better word. ’Tis said Cæsar received him kindly—his devotion to Germanicus was undoubted. It was even rumored he was to be made Consul. But one day when Cæsar asked him about the Governor in Syria, Fabius praised Longinus highly and declared he never failed in anything he undertook. It happened ill that on that very day came a message from the Oracle at Antium that Cæsar should ‘beware of Cassius.’ Fabius was sent for at once: everybody saw him come—no one saw him go. When Chærea made bold to inquire, Cæsar answered that, having ordered Longinus to be recalled and impeached, he had embraced the opportunity to reward Fabius, and added mockingly, ‘I dispatched him at once.’ As for myself,” she concluded with a burning glance at Asiaticus, “it would have been to Cassius Chærea instead of Cassius Longinus I should have deemed that the oracle referred.”

“The thought doth credit to your wit,” replied the other easily, “and I myself wonder it did not occur to Cæsar; although I believe no soldier could be induced to raise his hand against a Germanicus. But did not Fabius have a son?”

“He had a daughter—and”—with a cold smile, “much

wealth, of which latter, fortunately for us because we are poor, Cæsar seemed unaware: Fabius and the tribune were crafty. When Lucia died, Pomponia, the wife of Plautius, wanted to take the child; but she had formed a great friendship with Antonia"—waving her hand toward the garden—"and the little Octavia was strangely pleased with the Hebrew nurse. At best we have none too many slaves: so we begged Chærea to let her visit here awhile, which was to her own liking; and here she is to remain until her father returns—as to which the gods alone know. What is it?" she inquired of a slave who was approaching.

"A messenger from the palace for the noble Claudius," he answered with a low salutation to Messalina. Claudius turned a sickly white and began to tremble, casting a look of alarm at Asiaticus, who himself could not suppress a start; it was Messalina who commanded in even tones to show the messenger in.

It proved to be Chærea's associate, the tribune Sabinus, who after an elaborate greeting to Messalina informed Claudius that he was to join the Emperor at the theatre forthwith. Then, with the slightest movement of the eyebrows, which the ex-Consul alone observed:

"Come thou also, Asiaticus: almost all the magistrates are there and Cæsar will welcome the presence of one of thy taste and discernment when he himself appears on the stage."

The color crept back into the cheeks of Claudius.

"Is it for that only I am summoned?" he said, almost pleadingly.

"Most assuredly," the other carelessly replied: "What didst thou expect; the command in Germany—as Fabius received that in Syria?"

"Go, both of you," said Messalina; and as if moved by some subtle admonition, she added earnestly, "Would that I might join you: it almost seems as if something is to happen—that is what always thou art apprehending,

although I would enjoy the diversion," with a contemptuous glance at the trembling Claudius, his timorous nature again aroused by her words.

It was the last day of the Circensian games, which continued an entire week. In front of his palace, to the right of the ascent from the Forum, Caligula had built a huge wooden theatre for the purpose of the elaborate dramatic exercises which were to conclude the festival: and here he had spent most of the day, surrounded by the obsequious magistrates and under the watchful protection of his huge, fair-haired Germans, whose devotion had been won through extravagant gifts of money.

The Emperor was in a sullen mood. His dark malignant face was distorted by the passions which were devouring him, and he glared at the immense audience, composed of the most important personages in Rome, as if seeking some method of subjecting those present to the fate which had overtaken the protagonist in the play—made realistic by the introduction of an actual death in place of a simulated one, the stage deluged with the blood of the actor, whose dying groans contributed to the delight of the spectators. He stared sullenly at Asiaticus, acknowledging his respectful greeting with some insulting remark; then, turning to one of the Senators, enquired why the Grecian boys, who had been specially trained under his personal supervision for a feature which was to precede his own appearance in the closing scene, did not come.

"They are warming themselves, Imperator," was the reply: "the director begs indulgence in the interest of a more finished performance. Perchance Cæsar would rest and refresh himself while waiting?"

The evil eyes brooded a moment, then he nodded acquiescence, gave orders that no one should leave the theatre until his return, directed the prætorian prefect Vantinius to clear the way with the German guards and accompanied by Claudius, Asiaticus and a few Senators passed into the

street and started up the slope toward the palace. At the foot of the grand staircase he halted irresolutely: then, muttering that he would first go to the baths, turned aside into a long cryptoporticus which led to the bath house, attended only by the two tribunes and several of the palace guards.

The short winter afternoon was drawing to a close and as the little party advanced the underground passage became darker and gloomier in the creeping shadows. The Emperor shuddered and made as if to turn back. But the fatal hour had struck. Chærea approached and asked for the watchword.

"'Tis the same I gave to Fabius," said Caligula, with a cunning leer; then in a burst of rage, "Thy girlish voice and timid speech shall assail my ear no longer"—and he turned as if to give an order.

With a fierce imprecation the tribune drew his sword and struck heavily. Staggering under the blow which caught him between the neck and shoulder, Caligula endeavored to escape up the passage, but Sabinus caught him by the arm and thrust savagely with his dagger. With a loud cry for help, Caligula fell to the pavement screaming wildly, "I am not dead," while Chærea, shortening his sword, plunged it again and again into the writhing body as he cried, "Thou liest, beast, thou art ten times dead!" The others too pressed in and struck viciously until, bleeding from dozens of wounds, the quivering form grew still, when all fled down the murky passage and concealed themselves in a nearby house. Perhaps it should have been regarded as a portent of evil that it was the house of Livia, who had caused the death of Germanicus, in which the assassins of his son now sought a temporary asylum.

Roused by the screams and the sound of flying steps which echoed from the corridor, the German guards poured down from the palace. Three Senators who were first to reach the body, although free at least from actual

participation in what had occurred, were instantly put to death by the irate Germans. Bearing the heads of these victims, the guards surrounded and for a time barred egress from the theatre, in which the wildest tumult thereupon broke out. Someone shouted that all were to be put to the sword, and the air was rent with shrieks, groans and frightful imprecations, while women fainted, children were trampled, and men fought savagely in their mad efforts to gain the exits.

Meanwhile in the cryptoporticus another gruesome tragedy was enacted. After the departure of the guards Cæsonia, with the infant Drusilla in her arms, had rushed to the scene of the murder and cast herself despairingly on her husband's body. There she was found by Chærea and his little band on their way to the Capitol, and, before the tribune could interpose, a centurion named Lupus killed the Empress with a single blow at the moment one of his companions seized the child and dashed out its brains against the wall.

At the first alarm Claudius, in a paroxysm of fear, ran into the palace and cowered behind some curtains in an alcove. In the systematic search which followed he was discovered and for an instant death stared him in the face. But his captor was quick-witted enough to realize that the timid old man could not have been a conspirator: then under a sudden impulse he cried to his companions, "Here is a Germanicus: let us make him Emperor!" The rest of the guards came running from the theatre, from which the frenzied audience then fought their way out, surging down into the Forum and scattering the news throughout the city in time for the populace to greet the soldiers with a roar of approval, as they bore the protesting Claudius to the Prætorian camp.

In the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol where the Senate had congregated, Chærea reported and received the countersign of "Liberty"; and taking the cue, Asiaticus hurried

down to the Forum and harangued the multitude, declaring that what had happened came directly from the gods—he only wished he had been the chosen instrument; closing with an impassioned plea for a return to the ancient liberties of the Republic.

But the people were cold: they wanted license rather than liberty—it was not the system but the individual they had hated. The prætorians were for an Emperor and probably would have their way; at any rate, let them fight it out with the Senators. And while the latter were wrangling on the Capitoline as to the best method of establishing a Republic, a message came from the Camp that Claudius had been proclaimed!

In vain Asiaticus protested that at least the ancient right of the magistrates to fix the succession should be insisted upon: he found but a single supporter. As he himself had forewarned Chærea, Roman courage and fortitude had sunk too low: the prætorians ruled, and with them the myth of Germanicus was all-powerful.

Surrounded by the guards, amidst the acclaim of the mob, but still trembling with fear and dread, Claudius returned to the palace, where already Messalina was triumphantly installed. Ten days later she presented him with a son—Tiberius Claudius Germanicus, afterwards called Britannicus. Then for the first time freed from his craven fears, the imbecile Cæsar, with the babe in his arms, showed himself to the populace and was hailed as the Father of his Country.

Rome was in an ecstasy of joy. Everyone had hated the tyrant and foreseen the end; everyone approved the deed and applauded its accomplishment. But it was manifest that the death of three innocent Senators did not constitute adequate expression of the universal feeling. The *manes* of a murdered Germanicus demanded a victim, quite as much as to the signal favor of the gods was due a fitting sacrifice. So the bodies of Chærea, Sabinus and Lupus,

first exposed on the fatal Gemoniæ, were dragged through the Forum to the ever-welcoming Tiber, while the city rang with the cry, "*Vixerunt: Salve Imperator!*" (They are dead: Hail to the Emperor!)

THE TRIUMPH OF CLAUDIUS

ON a glorious spring morning in the year 797 from the Foundation of the City—A.D. 44—Rome awoke to the extravagant joys of an imperial triumph, the most splendid of those elaborate celebrations which marked certain notable events in the history and progress of the Roman State.

To a large proportion of those who were awaiting the spectacle, it was to be of a sort never before enjoyed. It is true the mad Caligula had thus commemorated his famous invasion of Britain, comprised in his sailing a few *stadia* from land, then putting back to shore to engage his troops in mock combat, in which sea-shells, gathered for the purpose, constituted those “spoils of battle” essential to the proper celebration of a triumph. But all men knew this was no real Imperator, and had sneered while they pretended to acclaim and cursed while affecting to applaud. So that, although of the lesser triumphs accorded to men of consular rank there had been many, not since the conquest of Egypt by Augustus had Cæsar himself acquired the right to lead a victorious Roman army to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. Today, fresh from his campaign in far-off Britain, which since the days of Julius Cæsar no Roman army theretofore had invaded, Tiberius Claudius Nero, after consummating in person the heroic achievements of Aulus Plautius, was returning to consecrate the valor of his soldiers and the extension of his empire by solemn sacrifice to the god who embodied the might and dignity of Rome, and through whose protection the victory had been won.

News of the decisive defeat of the barbarians and the capture of their stronghold—Camulodunum (Colchester)—had reached the city three weeks earlier. The honor of conveying it had been awarded to two noble youths returning from their first campaign: Lucius Junius Silanus, a great-great-grandson of Augustus, and Cneius Pompeius, descended from the famous Triumvir. Pompeius was barely eighteen and Silanus only fifteen, but already they had received special recognition from Claudius, each having been enrolled among the *Viginti Viri*, appointed prefect of the city during the *Feriæ* (Festivals) and accorded the right to stand for the other offices five years earlier than custom prescribed. Moreover, Silanus had been formally betrothed to the Emperor's youngest daughter, Octavia, while the elder, Antonia, was about to be married to Pompeius.

In his dispatch to the Senate Claudius modestly expressed a hope that the deeds of the army might be deemed worthy of the traditional reward. Gratified by this recognition of their ancient rights, the Senate promptly decreed a triumph with all the honors: gave the title of Britannicus to Cæsar and his son, and granted to Messalina the privilege of the front seats enjoyed by the Empress Livia, and the right to use the *carpentum*, or State chariot—an honor which in ancient times had been accorded only to images of the gods.

A period of feverish activity then ensued, and all the mighty resources of the State were invoked in preparing for the event. Fortunately it had long been anticipated, since otherwise in the short time remaining the desired result would have been unattainable. Months before, a troop of elephants and large numbers of wild animals for use in the games had been commanded. Vast stores of food and other supplies had been requisitioned and were pouring into the city daily. Elaborate decorations of all public buildings were under way, and an army of slaves and artisans labored incessantly in the construction of

arches, platforms and other temporary structures. A generous collation was to be given the troops before they entered the city, and a magnificent banquet was to be spread for Cæsar at the conclusion of the ceremonies in the temple. Finally, on the days following the Triumph proper the populace, including the disbanded soldiers, were to be entertained from morning till night—and from night until morning, with every conceivable appeal to the passions and love of excitement of Rome's panting millions, made doubly eager and responsive by a lavish apportionment of money which Cæsar had decreed. There were to be chariot and horse races in the Great Circus, gladiatorial and wild beast combats in the amphitheatre of Statilius Taurus, dramatic exercises, pantomimes and dancing in the huge theatres of Balbus, Pompey and Marcellus, athletic contests in the various *stadia*, and naval battles on the river—the intervals between the important spectacles to be filled with illuminations, distribution of presents and unlimited feasting and drinking—all at the cost of the State!

The city was astir early: in fact, before daylight even, the people began to congregate at the street corners and in the open places. Already the wine shops and eating houses were filled to overflowing with the countless thousands who had poured in from the suburbs, and when the day broke the crowds had become enormous. Rain had fallen in the night, but as usual at the time of year the morning sun shone from a cloudless sky and, although beneath the porticoes and in the shade of the tall buildings the air was sharp and biting, its sting was quickly drawn wherever the warm rays fell.

Along the route of the procession the people were not allowed to stand. But they massed in the neighboring porticoes, on the immense platforms in the open areas, along the river banks and on the bridges; they packed the benches in the huge Circus Maximus, through which the procession was to pass; they swarmed on the balconies,

the roofs, the housetops and aqueducts, while terraces, gardens and hill-sides were blended in one weltering mass of humanity, basking in the genial warmth as, with every sense quickened, they listened in feverish excitement for the opening blare of the trumpets.

The home of Cæsar on the Palatine had not escaped the prevailing contagion. As the sun shot its first beams upon the gilded chariot of Apollo surmounting the pediment of the lofty temple which crowned the hill, the palace hummed like a monstrous beehive with the buzz and chatter of its thousands of awakened slaves. In the courtyard a superb *reda* (a species of light carriage), its body richly ornamented in shining metal, with leather hood, embossed in gold and silver, and purple hangings blazing with jewels, drawn by a pair of coal black horses, was already waiting with a mounted company of guards in charge of the prætorian prefect to convey Messalina to the camp beyond the Tiber. A true artist, she wished no anticlimax: the magnificent chariot in which today for the first time she was to ride, following the Emperor, had been dispatched the night before.

The vestibule swarmed with the friends of the imperial household; Senators, knights, poets, rhetoricians and the wealthy and powerful freedmen who basked in the favor of Cæsar—and especially of Cæsar's wife—all had assembled to pay their adulation to the beautiful woman who was recognized as the governing force in Rome.

The Empress paused in the atrium and bade an attendant hasten to the children's apartments and if Pythias were awake to bring her quickly; but as the messenger disappeared on a run the object of his quest darted out of an alcove and beamed up at her.

"Whence camest thou?" said Messalina in surprise.

"I have been hiding here," she answered fearlessly. "Last night I begged Eunice to bring me, but she was cross and said I shouldn't come—that thou wouldst be angry. But I did so want to see thee ride away in thy

beautiful carriage: so I crept out of bed and have been waiting. Please do not punish Eunice; she doth not know I'm here—'tis my fault alone."

The Empress stooped quickly and kissed her on the forehead. The fearless spirit of the child, her wit and beauty—above all her loyalty and devotion to Octavia, always had appealed strongly to the emotional side of the wayward and unprincipled woman, whose genuine love for her children was the one redeeming trait in a character otherwise seemingly lost to self-respect and apparently wanting in the barest semblance of womanly virtue.

"No one shall be punished in the palace on this day—least of all one who is dear to me," she answered, gently caressing the dark hair as she continued, "What hath Eunice planned for Octavia and thee today?"

"She saith we may not go out—that we can see enough from the roof," answered Pythias with a catch in her voice. "Antonia's going: she saith from the palace you can't tell one man from another and she wants to see Cneius ride by."

"And is there someone thou art eager to see ride by?" said the Empress smiling.

"I'd love to see Cæsar driving his white horses—and thee in thy great chariot," Pythias replied demurely.

"Fie, fie, it becometh thee not to flatter: leave that to the freedmen and slaves," chided the Empress. "Did I not see the young Varus give thee a rose last evening when he came from the camp with a message? Mayhap 'tis thy lover who is drawing thee."

The dark eyes of the girl sparkled with mischief as she flashed back coquettishly, "He is not my lover—yet!"

Messalina laughed in sheer delight.

"A woman always saith 'No' when she lets the little god in. Be not apologetic: Junius is a manly youth, worth a dozen such as the strutting lover of Antonia, or the milksop Silanus. Justus"—to the captain of the prætorians who was waiting at the entrance—"Cæsar's

children would see the spectacle from outside the palace: hast any here for whom thou wilt vouch as to their safety?"

The prefect bowed and a moment later ushered in a handsome youth of eighteen, lithe and active as a gladiator, with clear-cut features, laughing eyes and dark curling hair. Appraising him in one sweeping glance, the Empress asked:

"Art willing to forego the march to guard Cæsar's children? Thou shalt be rewarded."

"Most willingly, and it is thy wish," he answered with an engaging smile. "But I am in Cæsar's service and want no reward for serving in Cæsar's way. It were honor enough to be the little lady's tribune"—glancing kindly at Pythias.

Messalina regarded him curiously: "Who is this man in Cæsar's palace who wants no reward?" she said drily to the prefect.

"'Tis Marcus Ælius," Catonius answered in a low voice. "He is a centurion in the first cohort: his father was a knight who died fighting with Germanicus; his grandfather perished with Varus as did his father under the Dictator. There is none among the prætorians better liked or more trusted. Pompeius and Silanus are his friends and the young Varus is in his Company."

With that charm of manner which brought all men to her feet, Messalina extended her hand to the young knight, as she said graciously:

"I thank thee—and thou hast supplied us with the word. Pythias, promise that thou and Octavia will go only where the centurion permits—and behold! The tribune of thy guard, who shall be at thy orders today"; and turning to the Atriensis, or head slave, "Thou hast heard—inform Eunice and the prefect of the palace."

Pythias, who had listened in an ecstasy of delight, threw herself at the knees of the Empress and covered her hands with kisses, as she cried ingenuously, "Oh, thou art

so good to me—I love thee.” Then springing to her feet she whirled about and said to Marcus with an air of command, “Thou wilt report with thy guard in the small courtyard at the third hour”; and forgetting to await her dismissal, with an articulate cry of joy fled down the portico.

The eyes of the beautiful and reckless woman, who lived only for her emotions, followed her wistfully. She had an instant’s vision of her own bright youth, care-free, joyous, uncontaminated—while now——

“Messalina is divine in her transcendent loveliness to-day,” a soft voice whispered; and she turned to meet the dark face of the handsome Pallas who stared boldly at her as he continued: “The charms of the Cnidian Venus pale into insignificance before the radiant beauty of the Augusta!”

The *Augusta!* the title she had coveted: hers at last today! Empress, indeed, of proud Rome, and in her own person deified as the true goddess of love and beauty! With a compelling rush, all the native tendencies which had shaped her dissolute career resumed their sway and the vision she had momentarily glimpsed in the soul of a pure and virtuous young girl vanished like an impalpable mist in the blaze of the noonday sun. With all the ardor of her wilful, passionate nature, she threw herself into the torrent of this new and splendid intoxication, and to the subtle comprehension of the scheming sycophant at her side the spirit which drove her was manifest. It disclosed itself in the quick proud uplift of the dominant head, with its crown of gold-yellow curls; it sparkled in the resplendent blue eyes; it flamed in the rich coloring of her cheeks, and found its final expression in the air of overweening vanity with which imperiously she swept down the marble stairs and entered the waiting carriage.

The unexpected appearance of a vehicle, with curtains tightly drawn, escorted by an entire cohort and driven at reckless speed towards the camp, excited the wildest con-

jecture. But in the absence of a better surmise the event was accepted as a forerunner of the long-awaited signal and the cavalcade was speeded on its way with cheers. And scarcely had the flying *reda* clattered across the Ælian bridge before the strident note of a bugle vibrated through the valley and awoke faint echoes in the hills. "*Adveniunt!*" (They are coming) cried the piercing voice of a look-out on the Arx; then a distant sound like the far-off mutter of a thunder peal broke beyond the river, rolled steadily along the Triumphal Way and looping around into the Forum swept up to the crest of the Tarpeian Rock in one sonorous diapason—"Io *Triumphe!*"

Through the gate of Victory, over the ancient bridge and into the broad way through the Campus Martius, the stately procession moved. Trumpets blared, banners waved, metals gleamed, while the air was rent by the frenzied shouts of welcome to the returning heroes, marching proudly in the glorious sunshine under the matchless blue of the Roman skies, suffused by the slow-ascending spirals from the smoking sacrifices on a thousand altars. On past the glittering temples, shrines and arches; in the shadow of the noble Pantheon and the mighty baths of Agrippa; through the immense theatres of the Republic and beneath the beautiful Porticus of Octavia; across the Forum Boarium, along the Great Circus and around the Palatine to the Sacred Street the gorgeous spectacle wound its majestic course, amid a crescendo of rapturous applause as the increasing multitudes in the valley blended with the greater masses on the encircling hills.

From a sheltered balcony in the Domus Gelotiana, on the south slope of the Palatine, added to the imperial palace by Caligula for convenience of access to the Great Circus, which it overlooked, Pythias, Octavia and Antonia, under the watchful eye of Marcus and two prætorian guards, gazed with rapt interest at the marvellous panorama below.

Preceded by a band of trumpeters first appeared the

spoils of war, and its indicia: weapons, banners, images of strange gods, the sacred utensils from their altars, life-size paintings in bright colors of combats with the barbarians, with representations of their captured forts and strongholds mounted on huge wheeled platforms drawn by elephants, a model of the triumphal arch which the Senate had voted to Cæsar and the boat in which he had crossed the Thames—the latter borne by stalwart legionaries, their brawny arms twined with laurel.

Behind a company of flute players, breathing weird music, came the white bulls, with gilded horns, destined for the sacrifice, attended by a body of priests in flowing vestments and the *Camilli*, boys of high birth carefully selected for their beauty and physical perfection, who were employed in the religious rites and ceremonies.

Next followed a horde of prisoners, wild and savage in aspect, sturdy of figure, scantily clothed in skins, with long fair hair and blue eyes, staring in childish amaze—their leaders in chains limping behind, pale and haggard but undaunted. Behind these marched the prætorians, ten thousand strong, occupying the place which from time immemorial had belonged to the magistrates, until Augustus put them behind him to symbolize his position as chief citizen of the State.

And now a deafening roar which shakes the hills—"Salve Cæsar—Io Triumphe!" as the triumphal car, blazing with gold and silver and drawn by four white horses harnessed abreast, their purple trappings glittering with pearls and precious stones, preceded by the lictors, their *fascæ* wreathed with the laurel of victory, rolls proudly by—the horses guided by golden reins held by the Emperor's sons-in-law, robed in white togas and crowned with garlands, riding on either side. In his gold-embroidered *toga picta* of Tyrian purple, crowned with the Delphic laurel, an ivory sceptre surmounted by an eagle in his hand, in the eyes of the populace the proud vain-glorious Cæsar embodied all the ideals of the dominant

Roman world. Forgotten were the sneers at "the half-witted son of Agrippina": absence blunts the edge of criticism and contempt vanishes in the glamour of success. Yet ever and anon his unwilling ear is dulled to these cries of ecstatic joy by the dissonant whisper of a slave resting on the step of the chariot: "Look behind, Cæsar: *hominem te esse memento*" (Remember, thou art only a man!).

And then another splendid chariot, the great State *carpentum*, its four black horses driven by a giant Nubian, his naked body gleaming like polished ebony, with the Augusta reclining luxuriously upon the purple cushions of its lofty seat. Robed in white, with bordering purple, blazing with jewels from the garland of splendid pearls interwoven with corn (symbolizing her deification as Ceres), which crowned her yellow curls, to the little feet incased in sandals garnished with precious stones, she swept along in all her radiant beauty, under the full emotions of inordinate vanity and sensuous desires—the zenith of her ambition attained in the frantic acclaim of the frenzied crowds—"Hail to the divine Augusta!" No sombre-faced slave to gibber reminder of *her* mortality: no grinning death's head obtruding at her wide-spread feast. Not for her to "Look behind!" That were well enough for the imbecile Cæsar, old and decrepit; she was too young, too powerful, too firmly fixed in the seat provided by the gods—and safeguarded by her own shrewd artifices. And in the halo of her precedence, and as if in willing recognition of her power and in stern reassurance of her claims, followed the magistrates in their white robes with broad purple borders, their black sandals adorned with silver crescents, marching in solemn gravity; the military tribunes in their banded togas and the knights in full uniform, all on horseback—and the thousands of sturdy legionaries, their spears adorned with laurel, singing hymns to the gods, shouting, dancing, tossing their weapons in the air and exchanging jovial greetings and facetious jokes with the eager and delighted crowds.

Finally, at the heels of the cohorts, surged that other tumultuous army of the rabble, which had begun to form as the last company passed through the Triumphal Gate and steadily recruited its straggling ranks as the procession advanced.

As soon as the Empress passed, the little party hurriedly left the balcony, and hastening back to the palace crossed Caligula's bridge to the roof of the Temple of Saturn which overlooked the line of march up the Capitoline Hill. They arrived as Cæsar's car was approaching the upper end of the Forum, the slow-moving column visible the entire length of the Sacra Via to its junction with the Triumphal Street far away to the east; while the continuous roar from the southwest indicated that the last of the procession had not arrived at the Great Circus. The weary captives, their final hour not yet come, had been led aside to the various prisons; all but the helpless leaders, who having been severely beaten in front of the rostra now were on their way to the dark Tullianum to pay the full penalty of resistance to Rome. Hark! The sonorous voice of a lictor on the Gemonian stairs: "*Actum est!*" (It is finished!). A roar of savage joy reverberates around the Forum and the *manes* of the legionaries who had fallen in battle thus appeased, the great spectacle begins the final stage of its journey to the home of Capitoline Jove.

Swinging around the Vulcanal in front of the great Temple of Concord, the Triumphal Car turns into the Clivus Capitolinus, passing through the gateway formed by the Temple of Saturn on the one side and that of the Dii Consentes, the "Portico of the Twelve Gods," on the other. And now Antonia utters a glad cry of welcome as she intercepts an upward glance from Pompeius, riding at Cæsar's right, while the young Octavia, raised high in the arms of the centurion, waves in childish delight to her own betrothed, the handsome Lucius, saluting gaily as he passes directly below.

Pythias had been seeking eagerly, but vainly, for the face of "the one she wanted to see," when a whispered word from Marcus, pointing toward the great *carpentum*, flooded her face with color as her eyes fell upon the upturned smiling face of a young prætorian marching at the wheel of Messalina's chariot. Wonderingly he had reported there a half hour earlier, while they were awaiting the execution of the captives: now, as the Augusta laughingly bade him look up, he understood. For an instant Pythias stared, star-eyed and breathless: then impulsively tearing from her hair its crown of roses, leaning far over the parapet, she tossed the chaplet in the direction of the laughing boy, who caught it deftly, pressing it first to his lips, then to his breast, the Empress smiling broadly, while the roofs resounded with the cheers and laughter of the amused spectators.

Slowly the *cortège* toils up the steep ascent, turning at right angles behind the Tabularium to reach the Asylum, then back to the Area Capitolina, where at last the panting white steeds halt in the shadow of that other great quadriga—of which Cæsar's was symbolical—which surmounted the lofty pediment of Jupiter's Temple.

The day is drawing to its close, the wonderful bronze roof above them flaming in the last rays of the sun, as Cæsar and his sons-in-law prostrate themselves on the pavement before ascending on their knees the marble stairs. Passing through the splendid peristyle, they move through the majestic triple naves to the inner sanctuary where Jupiter sits enthroned, wearing his golden crown, with lance and thunderbolt in either hand. Here Cæsar alone may enter. Spreading rich gifts on the altar, and uttering his prayer of gratitude and praise, he places his laurel wreath in the outstretched hand of the god—to whose service the Car of Victory already has been consecrated. And with incantations of the waiting priests, in the smoke of incense and choicest hecatombs, the ceremony ends.

Then throughout the mighty city all classes give way in utter abandon to the mad passion for pleasure and excitement. For Cæsar and his friends a magnificent banquet is spread under the triple colonnades of the Temple, made bright as day by myriads of torches, some in enormous clusters supported on the backs of a score of elephants standing between the marble columns. Lights gleam and feasts are preparing in the houses of the nobles and upper orders also; while in the *subura*, the Campus Martius and all the humbler districts the riotous multitude has embarked upon an all-night's wild carousal.

Bathed in the silvery splendor of the midnight moon, the Palatine rests in all its majestic beauty. In the peaceful quietude of her little *cubiculum*, flooded with the soft light from Aventinus, a fair young girl dreams of a winsome youth who is kneeling at her feet, begging acceptance of a garland twined with faded roses. But she turns her head and murmurs softly:

“Thou art not my lover—yet!”

THE VICES OF AN EMPRESS

IN a small sitting room of the palace, closely adjoining her bed-chamber, Messalina impatiently was awaiting the arrival of Narcissus, for whom she had dispatched a slave in hot haste upon her return from the baths.

It was late in the afternoon of a day in September three years after the memorable occasion when she had been publicly acclaimed under the proud title of Augusta. In the interval Rome had been going from bad to worse—which with equal truth might be observed of both Claudius and his wife. For a brief period after the imperial dignity had been thrust upon him, under the wise admonition of Asiaticus, Seneca and a few others, Claudius had displayed a degree of prudence and sagacity which had amazed all who were aware of his mental and moral deficiencies: although perhaps his bearing in these respects was unduly magnified because of its sharp contrast with that of his hated predecessor. But from the time of his triumph the Emperor manifested at best only an intermittent interest in the welfare and orderly administration of the State, and rarely disclosed the semblance of dignity or sobriety in his personal conduct.

At the outset Messalina also had borne herself with marked circumspection, apparently absorbed in her children and the domestic affairs of the palace, and yielding to her natural disposition for pleasure and social gaiety only to an extent which won approval rather than criticism from a people to whom indulgences of the sort constituted the main object of existence. But with the de-

parture of Claudius on his campaign, the young Empress began to shape her conduct more in the line of her real inclinations, and during the eighteen months in which the reins of government were in the hands of the Consul Vitellius that unscrupulous profligate had assisted her in achieving substantial progress. A little later, when it had become apparent that the Emperor was no more concerned about her manner of life than he was with public affairs, Messalina discarded the last pretense of sobriety, and openly embarked upon a career of unbridled self-indulgence.

In Claudius, as husband, she had never professed the faintest interest. A beautiful, high-spirited girl of sixteen, she had married a worn-out libertine, ill-favored and of low mentality. Even in the matter of birth, she considered him inferior, by virtue of her double strain of Julian blood. Through his mother Antonia, Claudius was a grandson of the sister of Augustus, while Messalina traced to the beautiful Octavia through each of her parents.

Like most marriages among the Roman aristocracy, that of Messalina to her cousin proceeded alone from family considerations—acceptable enough to the ambitious young girl because of its latent possibilities for preferment. As for love, that would come of her own choosing: at a period when, as Seneca observed, not a few noble Roman ladies counted their age not by the Consuls, but by their husbands, divorce had become a commonplace. Ultimately, she did not consider it necessary even to make use of that recognized incident of marriage before yielding to her vagrant caprices: in the meantime, according to common gossip, scorning even the superficial respect for virtue and decency which at least she might have pretended by drawing the veil of secrecy over the indulgence of her lawless desires.

Well aware of the prevailing gossip, the Augusta was no more concerned by it than she was with the fact itself;

on the contrary, the lengthening list of her reputed lovers was at once flattering to her vanity and accepted as a welcome tribute to her beauty and personal charms. But although absolutely indifferent to the opinions of either her husband or the world at large, from the court flatterers and panderers down to the humblest slave in the palace it was well understood that instant retribution would attend the slightest hint of her indiscretions and irregular life to the younger members of the imperial household. So that to Octavia and Pythias she still remained the tender mother and devoted friend, abounding in those womanly virtues consonant with the love and admiration with which she inspired them.

This open and contemptuous disregard of her marital obligations unfortunately was not the greatest of her shortcomings. Gradually, she had realized that money was quite as essential as power to fully satisfy the cravings of her vain and sensuous nature: and in the acquisition of the former, as in the endless struggle to enlarge and safeguard the latter, she had not scrupled to adopt the methods of the first Augusta, who had lent herself to the darkest deeds in furtherance of her ambitions.

Thus Seneca, who interfered with her complete ascendancy over the irresolute Claudius, was banished under a charge of criminal intimacy with the Emperor's niece: while Julia herself, handsome, ambitious and highly esteemed by her uncle—and accordingly regarded by Messalina as a dangerous rival—was put to death. The same fate overtook the other Julia, daughter of the second Drusus and Livia, the sister of Claudius. She was detested by Messalina because of her virtue and incorruptibility and lost her life for refusing to pay court to the Augusta and associate in the palace revels and immoralities.

Cneius Pompeius, who had married the Emperor's eldest daughter, always had been disliked by the Empress. When Cæsar allowed him to re-assume his great ancestor's

cognomen of Magnus, of which he had been deprived by Caligula, he had become an object of suspicion to the Augusta, who speedily compassed his death by assassination, and forced Antonia into a marriage with Cornelius Sylla, a half-brother of the Empress. Similar considerations, although, as it was believed, even more dishonoring to Messalina, occasioned the death of Appius Silanus, whose son Lucius was betrothed to her own daughter Octavia. After the death of his first wife, who was a direct descendant of Augustus, to strengthen her position the Empress induced Claudius to recall Silanus, who was Governor of Spain, and marry him to her mother who had become a widow. But Silanus, a man of character and probity, curtly refused her ignoble overtures—and promptly paid the penalty.

In the little group of shrewd and powerful freedmen who controlled the slothful and degenerate Emperor Messalina found the precise assistance required to effect her nefarious purposes and enable the free enjoyment of her profligacy. Most of them were emancipated Greek slaves, who had first won favor through their sycophancy, and then made themselves indispensable by rendering sinister and degrading services.

First among this band of mercenaries was Pallas, who had charge of the funds, and whose brother Felix had been made Governor in Judea. Another was Narcissus, who as private secretary to Claudius enjoyed the privilege of carrying a dagger. A third was Callistus, through whom passed all petitions addressed to the Emperor. His talents for intrigue had been developed under Caligula, in whose service he had amassed great wealth. Another was Polybius, especially favored by Claudius as his mentor in scholarship.

As former slaves, these men were ineligible to high elective office: but through Lucius Vitellius, the Consul, who had won the regard of the Augusta by a display of extravagant and unblushing flattery and servility, all

necessary official sanction of the freedman's contrivances and plots, howsoever infamous, was readily obtainable.

The Empress had fallen into a brown study when Narcissus finally appeared. Whatever the subject of her meditation, apparently it was not unpleasant, if the pensive look in her eyes and the satisfied expression of her beautiful face were a criterion. When at last she turned toward the secretary, awaiting her pleasure in respectful silence, her voice was soft and her manner kindly as she said with one of her engaging smiles:

"Thou hast been long in coming, Narcissus: I had not thought thy duties with Cæsar would be so pressing, on this hot afternoon. Or was it a lady who detained thee?"

"Venus hath not been so good to me, Augusta: even if otherwise, I know of none fair enough to hold me when this door is opened," the young Greek replied in even tones, smiling in turn. "As for Cæsar, he gave me liberty for the day, which I have spent with Pallas in his gardens on the Esquiline, where he is building a portico near the little lake, and thy messenger was long in finding me. I crave pardon for the delay and hope to make amends by greater diligence."

The pleased Empress regarded him approvingly. She knew, at least had every reason to believe, he was entirely devoted to her, that he was full of expedients and always might be relied upon, howsoever difficult or dangerous the task.

"Be seated," she said graciously, waving him to a chair. "It is not so much diligence in service as advice of which I am in need. While resting with Arria and Calpurnia after the bath today, Mnester brought to us in the library a Greek named Lippus—recommended he said by thyself—who regaled us with a poem on the Bacchanalia which drove the sensitive Arria away and almost brought blushes to the brow of Calpurnia, who thou knowest is not over-prudish. October with the vintage

moon soon will be here, and it came to me with a rush: why not celebrate with our friends a festival which contains such possibilities for refined enjoyment?" and her eyes danced as she glanced meaningly at her attentive listener.

"It is a conception worthy of the divine Augusta," promptly replied Narcissus with a display of enthusiasm which advanced him farther in the good graces of the Empress. "There is plenty of time to prepare fittingly. Much money will be required and care in planning: but Pallas must supply the one, and with the help of Mnester and Lippus, who have taste and originality, directed by thine own unrivalled talents, we may be sure of an entertainment which in novelty and sauciness shall eclipse anything thus far tasted by thy friends. Tell me but where the revels shall be held, and I will see Pallas and the others at once."

"And I could tell thee that," the Empress answered, "thou hadst not been summoned. The Palatine affordeth no place; there would be eyes and ears in every alcove and behind each bush. There must be seclusion, with groves and running brooks—quite as much as *triclinia* and well-appointed kitchens. Thou hadst mentioned the hillside retreat of Pallas: might that suffice? Also have I thought of Lollia's gardens."

"The gardens of Pallas are beautiful and ample, but the requisite facilities for feasting and retirement are lacking," answered Narcissus. "Those of Lollia are admirably adapted: but dost consider she would consent to their use?"

"Already have I tried to interest her, but she is cold," replied the Empress. "But why not buy them—or take them?" with a gleam in her eyes.

Narcissus shook his head: "Lollia is the richest woman in the city, and sells nothing—not even her favors; even if she could be persuaded, her price would be exorbitant. As for the other and simpler way—in her case, it is not

to be thought of. The Emperor esteems her and Memmius Regulus, who still feels kindly towards the wife stolen from him by Caligula, stands highest of any man in Rome. Besides, Callistus would be lukewarm, as thou knowest. No, it is not to be considered."

Messalina threw herself back on the couch with an air of disappointment. "So I myself deemed," she said fretfully, "although I thought perchance thy skill might compass it. I fear we must find some place on the Appia, although it is far and over-much frequented"; and with a gesture of annoyance, she bent over to adjust the flimsy covering which had dropped away from her beautiful neck and shoulders. In so doing she failed to observe the look of triumph which Narcissus could not entirely repress. He had been fencing to ascertain whether the Augusta was holding back her real purpose—determined not to lose the advantage of himself finding the accepted solution.

"I mind me of a spot having unrivalled charms, noble Augusta, which if it meets thy approval might be acquired by careful planning," he said softly.

"Tell me," quickly rejoined the Empress in flushed surprise.

"'Tis the villa of Asiaticus," he answered: "the grounds are extensive, beautiful as a dream and easily guarded against intrusion, while the villa itself is unsurpassed in the luxury of its appointments."

"But Asiaticus is absent," she cried excitedly. "He would not lend it to me—we are not friends—nor would he sell: he, too, is very rich."

"Since he is vulnerable, that is the final argument, because, as Pallas truly observes, we are very poor," said the Greek with a meaning smile. "Methinks the gardens may become thine without the formality of a deed, or the cost of a single sesterce. Without a home here, Rome will have no charms for Asiaticus; if one may not live in Rome, as well not to live at all, and since the crossing

of the Styx is dark and lonesome, let us persuade Poppæa Sabina to cheer his passage with her company."

Messalina went from red to white, and to red again. Poppæa Sabina! The most beautiful woman in Rome—eclipsing even the Augusta, as she herself wrathfully was forced to concede; who frequently dined familiarly with Claudius in the palace; who even had presumed to cast admiring glances at Mnester, the latest fancy of Messalina, thus compelled for her own protection to remove the actor from his theatre, and at the risk of the Emperor's disapproval harbor him in the palace. And Asiaticus! The man she hated beyond measure for his cool assumption of superiority; who, like Seneca, had been a thorn in her flesh, tolerated at first only because his association in the government helped with the populace and later because he appeared invulnerable. Had the time come indeed when she might be rid of both these detestable figures? She bent her piercing glances upon the Greek, who met her gaze steadily, his features set in grim and resolute assurance.

"Tell me quickly," she cried with quivering lips; and shaking her clenched hand, "By Venus Victrix, and thou accomplish it, ask me anything—anything!" she panted with glowing face.

Noiselessly approaching the entrance, Narcissus cast a quick glance in either direction: no one was visible except the Augusta's trusted slave lounging discreetly down the corridor. Returning quickly, in a few whispered words he unfolded his plan to the eager Augusta who listened with bated breath and radiant face.

"Thou art a jewel," she cried admiringly. "Tomorrow, when thou returnest to thy villa on the Esquiline, thou shalt find there the Georgian damsel so much admired by thee yesterday at the slave sale in the Forum, who was bid in by the prefect for Claudius: I know the Emperor hath not seen her yet. But canst thou be sure the tutors of Britannicus will play their part?"

"If I had not been sure of them, never would they have found a place in the palace," replied Narcissus with cold assurance.

Messalina laughed gleefully: "Thou hast an answer for everything." Then in a sudden outburst of passion she raced up and down the room, the sleeveless stola dropping almost to her waist, calling the gods to witness that whatsoever else happened, Poppæa should die—should die, and her body should be dragged down the Gemoniæ that all Rome might know the shame of a would-be adulteress! Even the hardened Narcissus, who knew her every mood, momentarily stood aghast.

But the hurricane passed quickly. Gathering her dishevelled robes to her breast with one hand, she extended the other to the Greek, and with a look which might have fired the heart of any man—although it failed to add a single beat to the pulse of the self-contained, calculating freedman—dismissed him with the words:

"I would thou wert Claudius: if only thou hadst been born free in Rome, even yet mightst thou dream of the purple."

Having failed in his appeal for a restoration of the Republic at the time of Caligula's death, after the accession of Claudius Asiaticus held aloof from public affairs. But in time, through the urgent solicitations of the Emperor and the appeals of Seneca, he was induced to accept the prefecture of the city, and later, in response to strong popular demand, he entered upon his second consulship. Then came the banishment of Seneca, and with the steadily rising influence of Messalina, Vitellius and the freedmen, it became evident that any effort to revive the ancient liberties would be futile. Accordingly, he declined re-election as Consul and yielding to the solicitations of his ever-anxious wife, again turned his back on Rome—as the devoted Lucia fondly hoped, forever; this time, for greater safety, removing to the distant island of Crete where he owned a large estate.

Narcissus was not long in perfecting his evil plans. But, as he explained to the impatient Augusta, it was essential to certain success that the first move should be timed with the arrival of Asiaticus at Baiæ on one of his periodic visits. Messalina fretted and fumed at the delay, fearing that the coveted prize would not be hers in time for the vintage frolic. Admitting that such would be the result, the resourceful Greek consoled her with the suggestion that she might signalize possession of the gardens by offering her friends some brilliant little *feſta*; constituting, as he expressed it, “a sort of betrothal of the villa to its new uses, the actual ‘marriage ceremony’ to occur when another vintage moon shall roll around.”

“Indeed thou art a capital companion, Narcissus,” rejoined the pleased Augusta: “thou haſt a never-failing philosophy to comfort poor ſouls in affliction.”

At laſt, as the Ides of October were approaching, came a faſt courier from Baiæ, with the news that Asiaticus had landed. Sosibius, one of the tutors of Britannicus, immediately preſented himſelf to the Emperor and declared that Asiaticus had corrupted the Gauliſh legions, that under cover of his reſidence in Crete he had fomented an uprising in the Eaſt and now had landed at Baiæ to put himſelf at the head of a diſſatisfied party in Rome.

Always ſhivering under the nightmare of aſſaſſination, Claudius, in a tumult of fear, inſtantly diſpatched the prætorian præfect with a large body of ſoldiers to arreſt Asiaticus. At the end of a week Crispinus returned with his illuſtrious priſoner in chains. He was not taken before the Senate, but conveyed directly to the palace where, in the preſence of Meſſalina and Vitellius, the charges againſt him were repeated. When the ex-Conſul diſdainfully reſuſed to anſwer, Suilius, the other tutor of Britannicus, accuſed him of adultery with Poppæa and other ſhameful crimes.

Then the fine old Roman could reſtrain himſelf no

longer, and after pouring his scorn and contempt upon the "informers" made such an energetic and passionate defence that Claudius visibly was moved in his favor. Pretending to be similarly affected, Messalina tearfully begged leave to withdraw: but in passing out she whispered to Vitellius, "Take care that he doth not escape."

As the Emperor was deliberating, Vitellius cast himself at his feet, reminding him of all the high services which the accused had rendered the State, and urging that as an act of clemency he should be allowed to choose the manner of his death. Asiaticus, who had relapsed into proud indifference, remaining silent, the bewildered and imbecile Cæsar, assuming that the accused admitted his guilt, sadly accorded him the proposed favor: and in a tightly closed litter, escorted by Crispinus and a band of prætorians, Asiaticus was taken at once to his home in the gardens, which he had selected as the place of his death.

Night had fallen when the little *cortège* approached the villa peacefully resting in its beautiful environment under the splendor of the full October moon. From his favorite west veranda, Asiaticus composedly watched the construction of his funeral pyre against a heap of broken marble in a nearby opening. With a slight shock it came to him that he was gazing at the fragments of that wonderful group of the *Parcæ*—destroyed by a chance thunder-bolt which had riven a tall, overhanging cypress!

Turning to the prefect, he said courteously: "Tell me, Rufius, is it not the ninth day before the Kalends?"

"Thou hast said," replied the other stiffly.

Asiaticus fixed his gaze again upon the shattered marble, and murmured dreamily, "Six years ago tonight! Fabius, Chærea, you have waited overlong for me." Then turning to the court physician who had accompanied them, he extended both arms and said calmly, "I am ready; do thy part quickly."

With a couple of swift strokes Valens opened the large vein at the bend of each arm, and after Asiaticus had reclined upon a couch the principal veins in his lower limbs were cut also.

The blood flowed freely, and soon he grew drowsy. The attentive physician heard him murmur brokenly. "For thee, Lucia, I am sorry—but 'tis the will of the gods. At the command of Tiberius—or even under the blind fury of Caligula, I had not minded. But it is bitter—to die—by the devices of a shameless woman—Mays't thou be accursed—" and his voice trailed off into unintelligible whispering.

The prætorians stood stolidly in the shade of the portico. Rufus, leaning against one of the columns, callously stared into the moonlight. Except the tinkling sound of the rivulets—and the baleful resonance of that rhythmic patter on the marble flags—the stillness was profound. As the slow minutes passed, an occasional faint sigh floated out from the shadows of the porch. From the recumbent figure finally came a last convulsive shudder: then the silence was broken by the long mournful howl of a dog in the slave's quarters behind a grove to the east.

Valens bent quickly: "Bring a torch," he said to one of the prætorians, as he held a silver mirror to the pale lips. Then rising, he bent his head to Rufus and moved aside.

"Thou wilt wait with two of thy command," said Rufus to the attending tribune. "Place the ashes in the urn and deliver it to the *atriensis*—there were no orders—and report to me at sunrise"; and with the remainder of the guard, followed by the empty litter, he set out for the palace.

It was almost midnight when a stealthy footfall in the portico brought the waiting Messalina to the private entrance.

“Crispinus hath returned,” said Narcissus in a low voice: “*Actum est*. The ashes are at the villa awaiting the command of the Augusta.”

“Send the urn to the virtuous Lucia, with Cæsar’s thanks for the splendid gift of the gardens, which hath touched him deeply,” she answered with mingled scorn and exultation. “And Poppæa?”

“She dieth at sunrise,” said the other.

“May the gods bring sweetest dreams, Narcissus,” she whispered caressingly; “and if thy Empress is a part of them—I would not be ill-pleased.”

He bent over the fair hand a moment, then stole away into the shadows. She could not hear him muttering darkly, “I care not to mingle in thy future: may the foul fiend get thee!”

THE DAUGHTER OF GERMANICUS

IN all manifestations of what is termed life, there is a ceaseless contest between forces—in which respect the fundamental laws of society do not differ from those of animate nature. The precipitation of a new energy creates a vacuum, inviting a counter-force to rush in, which, if ultimately victorious, in turn is called upon to defend its supremacy.

Messalina unwittingly had opened the way to such a contest by consenting to the recall from banishment of the two daughters of Germanicus and the restoration of their property by Claudius—one of his earliest acts as Emperor. The lapse speedily was corrected in the case of Julia, who perished in the plot against Seneca, but in overlooking the elder sister, who was far the abler and more dangerous of the two, the Augusta committed a fatal error, which in the end sealed the fate of her own children.

Julia had invited disaster by careless contempt for the Empress and her undisguised efforts to supplant her with Claudius. Agrippina, cautious from the outset, became doubly so after the warning conveyed by her sister's fate. She carefully avoided giving offence to the all-powerful Augusta, whom she neither courted nor avoided: and in her associations with the Emperor never presumed to affect an intimacy or accept favors calculated to arouse the distrust of her niece. But quietly, patiently and in painstaking secrecy, with all the forces of her keen intellect and indomitable will, she was preparing to take

advantage of any opportunity which should present itself in the natural order of events, or which might be created artificially to make her son Emperor.

Inheriting the ambition and imperious spirit of the first Agrippina, her character had been tempered in the school of adversity and suffering, the fires of which in her case seemed merely to indurate, where a weaker nature easily might have been consumed. After the tragic death of Germanicus, she returned to Rome with her broken-hearted mother and at the early age of thirteen was married by the Emperor Tiberius to Cneius Domitius Ahenobarbus. Of high birth and great wealth, Domitius was one of the most depraved men of a period notable for its extreme laxity in morals; and the life of the sensitive and high-spirited girl, married in the full bloom of her youth to a dissolute old man, readily may be imagined.

A few years later Lepidus, a cousin-german on her father's side, who had married her sister Drusilla, engaged in a conspiracy against Caligula. He was put to death and under a charge of criminal intimacy with her profligate brother-in-law, Agrippina was compelled by Caligula to carry in her arms the urn containing the ashes of Lepidus all the way from Gaul to Rome. But her fortitude and lofty spirit yielded no more to this shameful scourging of her soul than had her mother succumbed under a similar trial—in her case, perhaps, under the circumstances no less shocking because voluntarily assumed.

Even Caligula dared not openly put to death a daughter of Germanicus. But although he had failed to break her spirit, he confiscated her property, publicly recorded her alleged shame, and banished her with Julia to the Island of Ponza near fatal Pandataria, where their unfortunate mother had died under the persecution of Tiberius. Her son Domitius, then only a year old, was entrusted to the care of his Aunt Lepida, the mother of Messalina.

During her exile the gods mercifully took the elder

Domitius, and after her recall so much of his estate as had not been dissipated by Caligula was restored to Agrippina, who purchased a small house on the Esquiline, where she lived quietly and unostentatiously. Realizing the danger of her position, isolated as she was, and without friends or supporters, her first step was to secure a husband who should be rich and powerful enough to protect her. A sister of her late husband had married Crispus Passienus, one of the few members of the Roman aristocracy who had escaped the rage of Caligula and the cupidity of the freedmen. Crispus was both wealthy and without enemies—the precise attributes of the husband of whom she was in search. To be sure there was his wife: but divorce was easy, and fortunately it happened that husband and wife were not in accord. Crispus was an orator to whom the cultured and intellectual Agrippina appealed, and the matter was arranged with ease and celerity. There were ugly rumors when he died a few years later, leaving his vast wealth to Agrippina. Serenely unconcerned, she returned to her modest home on the Esquiline, and with growing assurance, but cautiously as ever, proceeded implacably with her cherished design of raising her son to the imperial office in order that she might rule in his name.

It had become plain to her penetrating intellect that the first step of importance was secretly to win a supporter in the little band of adventurers through whom the Emperor was ruled by Messalina. Before making her choice, she weighed them all carefully. Vitellius, the ex-Consul had influence with the magistrates, but was too craven and contemptible: she would use him later, in a subordinate capacity. Although she knew that Seneca highly regarded Polybius, he was lacking in force and initiative; while Callistus she both hated and distrusted as the adviser of Caligula at the time of her disgrace. Between the remaining two she hesitated long: but, although Narcissus was the abler and more resourceful,

finally she decided to adventure with Pallas, as the most susceptible to flattery, and because an intimacy which readily might be cultivated between her husband and the State Treasurer would veil her own association with the latter.

Prompted by his wife, Crispus invited Pallas to visit him at his villa in Tusculum, Agrippina artfully pretending an interest in the freedman's plans for embellishment of his gardens on the Esquiline and the development of a great estate which he owned in Sabinum. Pallas was highly pleased by the attention, in which he found a tribute to his claims of descent from the ancient kings of Arcadia, who had ruled on the Palatine.

The personal charm and refined intellect of Agrippina appealed forcibly to his Greek love of the beautiful, while her strong character and inflexible spirit impressed him deeply. Gradually a confidence was established between them, and in the end, shrewdly foreseeing the advantages of an alliance with this resolute nature, he committed himself entirely to her projects.

At the close of a day in the spring following the death of Asiaticus, Agrippina was returning from a call upon her friend Junia Silana. Twilight was falling when she arrived at her secluded home, its vestibule effectively shut in from the street by a thick hedge and massed shrubbery. The litter bearers departed hastily to escape an impending shower, and as they passed out of view while she stood looking up at the approaching thunderheads, the figure of a man emerged from the obscurity of the portico at the side of the house and came towards her. He approached so quietly that she did not observe him until in the act of turning towards the entrance. For an instant she was startled, although moved by surprise rather than apprehension: but at the second glance she recognized Pallas and said composedly:

“I am glad thou hast come: I was about to send Burrhus

with a message—now fortunately both have escaped a journey in the rain.”

With a keen glance at the shadowy figure of a slave, blind and dumb, but otherwise sensitively alert, crouching in an alcove alongside the doorway, she led the way through the atrium into an inner apartment, where Pallas waited until she had spoken to Burrhus and informed the *atriensis* of her return. The little room had but one entrance; it was dark and covert and for the moment their privacy was further safeguarded by the rain, now falling heavily.

“Was it about Silius thou hast come?” said Agrippina.

“Thou knowest, then?” he answered eagerly.

“Yes,” she replied quietly; “I have been with Junia, who is in a fine rage, although she admits that at present it is suspicion only. But in such things Messalina is heedless, and once mounted careth not who see her ride. If true, already it is everybody’s business—and I was sure you and the others must know.”

“How far it hath gone with him we are not yet sure,” whispered Pallas, “but she is in the saddle, as thou hast expressed it, and makes no secret of it. She is carried away by this new passion, which hath swallowed up all the rest. Valens she looks at no more. Mnester hath been cast aside like an old glove. She hath forgotten her jealousy of Lollia, refuseth to discuss with Narcissus any of the schemes he hath on foot, never goes near the children, and thinks of nothing but her desire for Silius, who she declares is the handsomest man in Rome. The longer he remains coy, the stronger her determination to ride him down.”

“What thinkest thou?” said Agrippina: “and thy friends—of course thou hast spoken with them?”

“They are frankly alarmed—as am I,” said Pallas soberly. “The others were nothing more to the Augusta than passing fancies—men of little note and slender ca-

capacity who attained their highest possible distinction in being numbered among Messalina's lovers. This time it is different. She is madly in love with Silius, who is young, able, ambitious and of high descent. He is consul-designate, and as brother-in-law of Caligula hath been close to the purple. His wife is wealthy, shrewish and old—Claudius too is old—and as thou knowest, death comes as easily as divorce."

Agrippina sighed audibly. "Money and power—the world cares for nothing else: thinkest thou it is all worth while, Pallas?"

He stared at her through the gloom in sheer surprise: it was the first uncertain note ever struck by her in the robust theme she had sounded so persistently throughout their intercourse.

"It is worth while for thee, at least, noble Agrippina, because otherwise thou art lost," he answered drily.

"Yes," she rejoined, albeit a little weariedly; "always have I known it—and the knowledge hath made me what I am." Then proudly, and with her customary spirit and resolution, "Never have I faltered—and never will I turn aside or abate one jot while the gods give me life—and friends—" extending one hand to him, quite without affectation. "But let us continue; dost counsel anything? And the others—have they a plan?"

"As yet nothing," said Pallas, "but all are on the alert—even Vitellius. Since Polybius fell, the Augusta's every act is matter of distrust. Now she avows her mistake in believing he was in thy pay—but laughs, declaring that none the less he deserved death, as a friend of Seneca. She blundered in destroying Polybius: all are afraid what happened to him easily might happen to them—and fear makes secret enemies. But her foolish admission is a worse blunder which hath given even greater uneasiness to Narcissus and Callistus. There are none more faithful and devoted to Claudius: but, as Callistus observes, loyalty now counts for nothing, since after one

is dead it is too late to disprove a false charge. Besides, with Silius at her elbow, she would not need their services—at least, so they consider; and truly they are so anxious, a very little would range them against her.”

“Someone hath been indiscreet,” mused Agrippina. “Hast thou no fear, Pallas?”

“None,” he declared with emphasis. “Of course, when Narcissus told the Augusta Polybius was with him that night and thus could not have been at thy house, he was seeking only to save a friend and knew nothing of the truth or falsity of the story. Having lied, he must needs stand fast, and Polybius died with lips tightly closed—Rufinus who was present told me. Thou and I alone know the truth.”

“Come,” said Agrippina after a moment’s silence, “thou hast something more, I think.”

“Thou art a seer to read men’s minds, noble Agrippina,” said the Greek admiringly. “But no time hath been lost: what I have to say is occasioned directly by the matters we have discussed. All believe that a crash is coming: and if, indeed, the drama soon is to be played out, it behooves that the young Domitius quickly should be brought to the front of the stage.”

“What meanest thou?” said Agrippina, gravely.

“When the event falls, we must be ready to act instantly. Brutus struck—and fled: he should have been prepared to march over Cæsar’s body. ’Twas the same with Chærea, who struck boldly enough, but without plan to keep on striking if need be. In such an emergency there is scant opportunity to win quick acceptance of a new idea which never before hath been suggested even. As Asiaticus warned Chærea, albeit fruitlessly, no longer the magistrates and nobles determine, but the soldiers and populace. These latter must be taught what they want—and thus prepared to demand what *we* want.

“Thou hast lived in the shade so quietly Rome hath forgotten thy son not only is a Germanicus, but through

his noble mother descended from Augustus and thus of higher claim than the son of Claudius. Now is an opportune moment for the reminder. Thou knowest the Emperor proposes to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the City on the 10th day before the Kalends of May. If Domitius and Britannicus should appear in the Trojan games, it were easy to induce the prætorians and the people to hail thy son as the true prince."

Agrippina stared fixedly through the open doorway. The murky darkness without seemed no more impenetrable to her gaze than the mental obscurity which shrouded the portentous question thus suddenly thrust upon her. Always she had foreseen the probability of being forced to assume some desperate risk—but never had admitted the possibility that Domitius might be subjected to it. That was her one weakness. But she had found strength in that very weakness because, fully aware of it, deliberately and rigidly she had subjugated all feelings and emotions to the control of reason. And in this trying moment reason told her Pallas was right. None could foresee to what desperate length the Augusta might be driven under the spur of her mad passion: if Claudius should fall, with nothing effective prepared against her, Messalina would be impregnable.

And yet in the present quandary, feelings so instinctively strong and persistent, although not a product of the higher intellectual faculty, were not to be disregarded entirely. Moreover, these emotional doubts were not occasioned alone by fear for Domitius—much less for herself: rather they arose from a perception that everything might be lost in an attempt to gain not the prize itself but only a subordinate advantage.

"It is full of menace, Pallas," she said at last, "and unhappily it would seem, the larger the measure of success, the greater would be the consequent danger."

"Always there is danger in a great enterprise," replied the other lightly, "but it is less to be dreaded when boldly

faced and often shrewdly may be minimized. But in this truly I believe the risk is slight. The foolish old Emperor would not be angry; rather would he find comforting assurance in such evidence that the name of Germanicus still is potent in Rome. The freedmen secretly would rejoice in anything which might bode ill for the Augusta, who is the only one left to consider: and she is so preoccupied with the new infatuation, I doubt she would give the matter a passing thought. Moreover, I think easily she may be led herself to suggest it."

"That indeed would be a master stroke," said Agrippina, greatly relieved; "and thou couldst accomplish it, my doubts would yield."

"Then let it depend accordingly," said Pallas rising. "Send Burrhus to lounge near the Arch of Drusus each evening before sundown, until I shall pass him a message either that the Augusta is coming to thee, or that thou shall put thyself in her way. In either case, expect her to broach the subject: and may the gods keep thee, noble lady."

"I shall never forget," she said earnestly, again extending her hand. "But for thee, I doubt not my courage but my faith to have gone so far. I have trusted thee beyond all—and have never exacted a promise. But now I ask that if ill overtakes me thou wilt befriend, as may be, the young Domitius—and that never may he learn from thy lips that which thou knowest I would keep from him."

"I am honored by thy trust," he answered gravely; "and thou hast my promise."

"In this one thing are they alike," muttered the freedman, as he wound down the hill towards a wine shop in the *subura*, where his litter bearers were waiting: "'Do this for me—but don't let my children know of it.' But then, Agrippina is a woman, with a fixed aim—the other a cheap wanton, inconstant in everything. This one is dauntless and would face death with defiance on her lips—the other

is brave only when some one is at her side with a dagger and if death threatened would grovel in abject terror. The Augusta always thinks of herself—of her children not at all; this one thinks of her boy as well as of herself. The child with such a mother is lucky: as for mothers who think only of their children, they do not exist—in Rome.”

Three days Burrhus went to the Forum without result; on the fourth he returned with a message from Pallas that the Augusta was coming the next morning.

At about the sixth hour, while Agrippina was directing some planting in the shrubbery, two running slaves wearing the palace livery approached the entrance and directly the gorgeous litter of the Empress appeared. As it swept into the vestibule and came to a halt, the purple coverings were drawn aside, and Messalina appeared, luxuriously reclining among the cushions, on either side of her a small gilded cage, one containing a white nightingale, the other a blue-black talking starling. Over a tunic so fine as to be almost transparent she wore a robe of rose-colored silk, caught up with a clasp of emeralds, around her neck was a rope of lustrous pearls, gems sparkled in the rings at her ears and those which covered her fingers, and the gold filigree bands around her bare arms were heavily set with splendid jewels, which also gleamed from her yellow curls, wreathed with violets. With her rosy cheeks, white teeth and flashing eyes, she was a picture of youthful health and loveliness; but six years of tireless pursuit of pleasure and excitement, under reckless disregard of all feminine restraint, had left its indelible stamp in the bold stare of her eyes, the sensuous lines about the mouth and the coarsened expression of the otherwise alluring face.

She was eight years younger than Agrippina, who had just passed thirty-two; but in the contrast of the moment Agrippina, studiously garbed in black, her hair drawn severely back from her pale face, its natural expression of gravity artfully accentuated for the occasion, looked

old enough to be the mother of the radiant Augusta. "In truth art thou care-worn and commonplace, with not a trace of thy once boasted spirit," said Messalina to herself as she commanded the officer in charge to set down the litter and withdraw the attendants.

Agrippina advanced quickly, manifesting a pleasure more apparent perhaps because unassumed, as she said, "Truly I am glad to see thee, Messalina: but wilt thou not alight?"

"No," said the other, "I must hasten. The Senator Lateranus is giving a breakfast in the gardens of Pallas, who thoughtfully hath placed his charming little villa at our disposal, and already am I late. Silius is a guest—but not Silana"—with a hard laugh. "I heard thou wast at her house recently?"

"Yes," replied Agrippina quietly. "It was in passing on my return from offering prayers at my mother's urn in Cæsar's tomb: I was sorrowful and weary and craved companionship and a cup of wine."

"What said Junia?" Messalina inquired with a meaning look.

"Nay, I must not be a tale-bearer," Agrippina answered with a ghost of a smile, with her more significant than words. "But I hesitate not to tell what I said to her: 'That a husband needs must be left to do as he wills—because that will he do anyway.'"

"And she would profit to borrow of thy wisdom—which is deeper than tiresome old Seneca's philosophy," said the other laughing harshly. "But 'tis not of that I came to speak: where is thy boy?"

"His tutor hath taken him to the library in the Temple of Apollo; it pleaseth him to watch the scholars with their books, and to wander about the temple and observe the rites."

"'Tis a shame, Agrippina," said Messalina snappishly; "Thou wilt make a priest—or at best a mawkish scholar of the grandson of a soldier. 'Twere better hadst thou

sent him to the *lanistæ* who are training the gladiators for the coming festival. And that minds me what I came for. The Trojan games are to be staged, and Cæsar desireth that Domitius shall appear with my own son in the Circus, in order that the people may not forget they have princes."

"Ah, Messalina, spare me," the other cried appealingly. "The boy is so young, so timid and untrained. He is strangely sensitive about his red hair—'tis not the beautiful gold color of thine—and were they to laugh and make fun, 'twould shame him beyond reclaim. The people are not unkind—but they are rough and have much license at the games."

"Come," said Messalina, laughing, but not unkindly, "'twill not be anything to dread: Cæsar nor I would tolerate it. Myself will give orders to Rufinus that the prætorians shall cheer and applaud the child, and 'twill make a man of him. Burrhus is an old soldier: charge him to take the boy to the camp and make friends with the guards. And when the day comes, strip off those sombre colors and join Cæsar in the podium or if that may not be, because of silly custom, sit with the Vestals, bedecked as should a princess of the house and at least pretend some of the pride and fearlessness of thy youth—in the days of Lepidus," she added maliciously. "'Tis Cæsar's will and my wish: I have promised Britannicus. Courage! Thy proud mother would be ashamed of thee!"

"He is all I have left—or care for—be gentle with my weakness. I have suffered much and am all alone," said Agrippina, looking down; with all her rare self-control she dared not meet the eyes of the Empress. "Art sure it will happen as thou sayst?"

"By *Mater Magna*," said the other with a cruel smile, "if a soldier breaks my orders, or the mob fails to take the cue, the mock combat will be livened by real death. Fear not: send the boy to the palace tomorrow—or better, thyself go with him to Cæsar and have Rufinus summoned.

Tell them of his timidity—the red hair they can see for themselves. Above all, forget not to send him to the camp—here”—writing rapidly on a tablet which she took from a pocket in the litter; “tell Burrhus to show this to the tribune Marcus and to young Varus, a centurion in the first cohort—and they wished, these two even could persuade the prætorians to proclaim the boy Cæsar!”

“Cæsar, Cæsar, Cæsar! I can’t get out, I can’t get out,” shrieked the starling, clawing at the bars of his gilded prison.

“Hear the wise bird,” said Messalina, delightedly. “And now indeed must I hasten. Hola!” to the tribune beyond the entrance: “summon the bearers and tell the overseer ’tis a case for the whip if we are late.”

A moment later they had vanished, and Agrippina, with an inscrutable smile, turned toward the house, murmuring:

“Pallas, Pallas, thou art incomparable: methinks I may be requited for the shame incurred by a daughter of Germanicus in so demeaning herself with a freedman.”

OCTAVIA AND PYTHIAS

IN a secluded corner of the palace garden Octavia and Pythias were seated at a low bench, beside a small fish-pond fed by a marble fountain. They had dismissed their attendants and were engaged in the delightful pastime of intimate personal gossip, while drying their hair—which had just been washed—in the warm April sunshine.

The charm of the quiet little nook was enhanced by its complete privacy. The angle formed by a wing projecting from the gymnasium had been closed in by a wall of green box to the south of the fish-pond, the only access afforded by an opening in the hedge, flanked by artificial posts in the form of rampant lions which had been carved out of the living green by the skilful hand of the *topiarius*, or landscape gardener. The masonry, unbroken by any aperture, was covered with ivy, the tall acanthus plants at the base forming a background for the violets, lilies of the valley and dwarf amaranth, with their leaves of variegated colors, which were massed in front. The grass, sloping to the water's edge was gay with crocuses, while the pond was rimmed in brilliant colors by the blooming narcissus, hyacinths and other flowering bulbs, which crowded its banks.

In its simple beauty and spring loveliness the sunny enclosure constituted a perfect setting for the charming tableau of youthful innocence and beauty, which it now staged—the complete antithesis of those darker pictures associated with the crime-stained palace, in the shadow of which the fair young girls were resting.

At the first glance, the difference of five years in their ages was not apparent: indeed, it might have been overlooked in a closely drawn comparison, either as to physical or mental development.

In personal appearance the child of Fabius and his lovely Greek wife had not belied the promise of her early youth. Of medium height, straight, supple, deep-breasted, with rounded neck and arms, but without a trace of superabundance; flashing dark eyes, a wealth of dark hair, which showed a gleam of chestnut in the sunlight, with broad brow, small ears and finely chiseled features, her creamy complexion lightened under the slightest emotion by a generous display of color, she was a picture of beauty, grace and health.

Roman girls arrived at maturity early in that age, when it was not unusual for them to marry at twelve or thirteen; and although in her case the womanly curves and fulness were not so pronounced, Octavia, unusually tall for her years, was not far behind her friend in physical development. She had inherited the wavy black hair of the Claudian family, instead of her mother's yellow curls, but from Messalina had come the eyes, which were of the dark blue of a flawless sapphire. Her nose was straight, her chin softly rounded and firm, although not so resolute as to detract from the sweetness of the beautiful mouth, with its perfect lines; while her oval face was of the wonderful ivory whiteness in its rare combination with that illusive, healthful tint which is the despair of artists as it is the envy of womankind.

The inborn pride, inseparable from high lineage and social caste, was not wanting, but so tempered by innate modesty as to constitute additional charm. In her general expression there was a lurking hint of sadness, in part temperamental, but to an extent occasioned by a vague disquiet as to conditions in the palace, which all the arts and precautions of Messalina had not served to prevent. Nothing of the sort appeared in the counte-

nance of her friend—whose charming face was a truthful index of her soaring spirit and innocent, care-free mind. Studied in repose by a seeker of the ideal, doubtless Octavia would have received the palm for sheer womanly beauty; but in general the radiant Pythias, with her animated manner, engaging ways and urgent human appeal, was bound to prove the more impelling.

From constant association with her father down to the time of their arrival in Rome, Pythias had matured mentally far beyond her years, and in that respect had never been overtaken by the younger girl. But in the bare intellectual processes of study and reflection the latter excelled, and of late they had gone along side by side; indeed, to a certain extent, Pythias actually looked up to Octavia, in whom she recognized the higher vision, if not indeed the finer intellect. As for any superiority of the Emperor's daughter as such merely, Pythias never gave it a thought—nor would Octavia have tolerated the suggestion. The girls loved each other for themselves alone, with a sentiment as deep and genuine as it was to prove lasting. In each other they had found that tender feeling for which sensitive high-minded children yearn, and of which but for this chance acquaintance they might have been deprived: Pythias because she had no mother, Octavia because Messalina's affection for her children never crossed the line of sacrifice. To be sure, there was Britannicus to whom his sister was passionately devoted—and her father of whom she was fond in a way: really, she had been closer to him than to her mother, since Claudius made a practice of having his children at meals whenever affairs of state, or personal indulgence, did not prevent. But it was a woman's love and tenderness Octavia craved; and the frank, warm-hearted Pythias, who with her joyous disposition, her ardent temperament, her fearless spirit and loyal nature, had caught Octavia's fancy as a child and gradually wound about

her affections, in the end became a veritable sheet-anchor in the storms and sinister under-tow against which the unfortunate girl was predestined to struggle.

The love of Pythias for Octavia was even more intense. In the grief and loneliness occasioned by her aunt's death, and her boundless despair at the disappearance of her beloved father, she had found relief in passionate devotion to the winsome child who at the first had left its mother's arms to come to her. From the Emperor and Empress she had received nothing but kindness—Messalina especially having treated the motherless child with a consideration which bordered close upon tenderness. Inheriting her father's sterling traits, if only from gratitude and a sense of loyalty, she would have been as devotedly faithful to the family of her protectors as Fabius had proved to Germanicus and his household. So that later, after the disclosure of the tribune's tragic end, finding herself alone in the world, bravely she arose from the ashes of her bitterness and gave herself without reserve to the cultivation of this new love, in the warmth of which her rarely beautiful spirit unfolded to its fullest perfection. "It is for life and death, Octavia," she would whisper: "I pray *Magna Mater* that the time shall come when I may give back some little of what thou hast given me!"

Pythias leaned over and buried both hands in the masses of rich, damp hair which hung on either side of Octavia's neck. "How it gleams in the sunlight," she cried admiringly: "it is so different from my homely old black thatch, which hasn't a bit of fire. Almost am I willing to become a Vestal to have an excuse to cut it off."

The other laughed outright. "If thou hadst fire in thy hair as well as in thy eyes, I know not what would become of poor Junius. And if only he could hear thee talk of serving Vesta—which would mean for him thirty years of dreary waiting! Only yesterday he told my mother he was ready to jump into Tiber unless Cæsar

would consent to thy marriage before the October Ides. 'Tis with the yellow veil of wedlock, rather than gleaming hair, he would love best to see thee crowned."

Pythias hid her flaming cheeks on the other's shoulder and said brokenly, "I love him dearly, but thou knowest, as doth Augusta, I shall not marry Junius until thou art ready to put on the all-white *stola* and make thy home with Lucius. Varus knows it too," raising her head with a jerk and doubling her small fists, "and he'd better stop pestering Cæsar about our marriage. If he isn't willing to wait until I am ready, he can go and marry that cross-eyed Traulus girl, with the skinny arms and flat chest!"

"Be careful, vain one," replied Octavia playfully; "perchance such a fate would not distress Varus overmuch. It is not fair to speak of Quintilla as cross-eyed; 'tis from coquetry she twists her glances so. Nor would it be strange if Junius preferred her splendid tawny hair to the dull 'black thatch' which so disquiets thee—of which now I can understand the reason"—smiling mischievously. "And all thin girls are not homely. Look at the step-daughter of Scipio, who hath just wed Rufinus: Poppæa is flat as a herring, but I heard my mother say to the prefect that he had married the prettiest girl in Rome."

"Don't, Octavia," said Pythias dolefully: "I know Quintilla is beautiful, and I'm terribly jealous—especially of her hair and eyes, which are lovely, while mine are just dark and commonplace. Junius is so unreasonable. But so far as I am concerned, he's got to wait until thou and Lucius are married, and if he won't, and marries Quintilla (she's determined to get him), I really have made up my mind to be a Vestal. Vibidia saith she'll be glad to have me at the first vacancy, if only it may be proven I am not more than nine years old! and that a word to the pontiff from either your mother or the Emperor would fix it."

"I love thee for it, *cara mea*," said Octavia with a little catch in her voice, pressing closer, "and although it is selfish, truly it seems I could not bear to lose thee yet. But thou needst have no more fear of Quintilla than I have that thou wilt choose the headdress of Vesta instead of the wedding veil; and I am the less self-reproachful because I know nothing except death can keep thee and Junius apart. There is none who may command his marriage with another except Cæsar himself, who will never break his promise—if only because my mother would not permit anything which would bring thee pain. Junius chose thee from his heart. That is as should be in marriage: I have thought deeply on it. 'Tis different with Lucius and me. I believe he hath learned to care for me—even as I care for him; but everyone knoweth it came not from his desire, but because my father and his had so arranged—before he had seen me even! That is the Roman way, to which most of us are bound—although it yieldeth not the perfect joy which love bringeth to the maiden who herself hath aroused it."

"The Roman way is as good as the other when the gods will it shall end well—as hath happened to thee," said Pythias stoutly. "If only I am sure the man I'm going to marry hath learned to love me for myself, I care not whether the little god Eros led him my way—or his father said 'Behold! this one shall be Caia!' Junius loitering near the garden happens to see me, and—as he pretendeth—his love taketh root on the instant. Lucius happens to find thee, through his father and thine pointing the way, and in time discovereth in thee all that makes life beautiful. If really there is any difference in what hath happened, 'tis in thy favor: because the plant which roots slowly hath a stronger hold to withstand the drouth of trial and the winds of adversity. Lucius wouldn't *threaten* to jump in the Tiber if he lost thee; he would do it!"

"Always hast thou the nimbler wit, but in this thing

have I the truth," said Octavia earnestly. "Doth not a man prefer to choose his own rose?"

"Junius doth not," said the other quickly: "he careth more for those I give him."

"There, again, hast thou worsted me," laughed Octavia. "But on thy heart now; wouldst thou really be as happy if my case had befallen thee?"

"Now, Pallas Athene forgive if I am wrong," said Pythias with mock seriousness; "but if thou meanest, would I be as happy with Lucius as with Junius, no! No—a thousand times!"

"Now indeed art thou making a jest of my feeling," said Octavia reproachfully.

"Forgive me," cried Pythias, impulsively throwing her arms around the other's neck. "But it grieveth me to see thee distressed without cause. Junius saith Silanus looks up to thee as to a goddess."

"Perchance that is it—while I want him to love me only as a woman," said Octavia with a sigh. "But I am the one who should beg forgiveness: selfish and childish and silly have I been. Still, it had long troubled me and I am glad we have spoken, because truly thou hast made me easier and happier."

Pythias kissed her fondly. "Let us talk of other things," she said. "What is the great secret thou promised to tell before midday—the time is pressing," glancing up at the sun.

"'Tis three-headed, like Hercules' dog, and will delight thee as greatly to hear as thou wouldst be shocked to meet the fabled monster, the story of which is scarcely more difficult to believe than what I have to unfold," said Octavia pompously.

"Tell me quickly," implored Pythias, trembling with excitement: "how shameful to have kept it to thyself so long!"

"First, then," said Octavia with provoking deliberation, "my mother sent for me early this morning and—but

shall I begin at the bottom, or wouldst be carried at once to the pinnacle?"

"Now the Furies hear me, but I am minded to give thee a shaking: begin as thou pleasest, so thou dost begin, but pour it out quickly: canst not see I burn with curiosity?"

"Surely art thou lacking in the restraint which befits a candidate for Vesta," said Octavia severely. "Vibidia ought to be cautioned. But have thy greedy will and take it in one lump.

"Bassus goes to Cæsarea on a mission and in his place Marcus hath been appointed a tribune of the palace guard, in special charge of Cæsar's daughter; we are to have a box next to the podium of the Emperor in the Great Circus: and if Pomponia can be induced to take us in charge on the last day of the Games, we may invite to sit with us whomsoever we wish."

"Octavia, thou art a wizard!" shouted Pythias, jumping to her feet and dancing about in delight. "A hecatomb to Zeus and a libation to all the gods, as Marcus saith! Thinkest thou the lady Pomponia will come? And dost thou really mean we can have Junius and Lucius—and need have no one else unless we wish?"

"My mother said, 'the daughter of Fabius will be making eyes at Marcus most of the time and lest Junius be soured, to pleasure him the Traulus girl should be invited,'" Octavia answered solemnly. "As to Pomponia's coming, I doubt. Never hath she appeared in public since my cousin Julia died: Pomponia loved her dearly. But the General Plautius, after his triumph tomorrow, will receive great acclaim when he shows himself with Cæsar in the podium, and a wife ought to delight in witnessing her husband's honor. Mother said it might help if thou and I also entreat her and that if so minded we can go to her villa today. Already Marcus is on duty."

"*Eia*—thy secret is more wonderful than Cerberus—it

hath a fourth head," laughed Pythias gleefully. "I'd love to see the lady Pomponia again: my aunt Lucia said she was the best woman in Rome—that's more than may be said of thy beautiful Poppæa, if the gossips are right. But if she won't come, would not thy mother sit with us?"

"'Tis not permitted," replied Octavia. "At the games some consider the Empress even may not join Cæsar in the podium, but must sit with the Vestals."

"Well, then, Pomponia must be persuaded. Now Pallas Athene be good to us and I promise a sacrifice."

"Why dost thou, a Roman girl, call on the gods of Greece? Indeed," continued Octavia reflectively, "often I wonder that thou who makest slight pretense of believing in the power of the gods, yet appealest to them for help—at least in careless talk, if not at the altar."

"I suppose 'tis because of my Greek mother—whom my father loved to follow: and as he himself explained to me, they are the same gods as those of Rome, only the Greeks named them first. And if I, who thou sayst believe not, yet call on the gods—perchance I might ask why it is that thou who makest strong pretense of believing, always brooding and making prayers and sacrifices—callest on them never in everyday matters?"

"I am not sure how much I believe," said Octavia, casting down her eyes and plucking nervously at a flower. "Sometimes I think 'tis fear alone that moves me; Miriam saith"—dropping her voice almost to a whisper—" 'tis nothing but superstition."

"Miriam is at her old tricks and would best beware; always my father was angry at her prating to me of the Hebrew's 'One and only God.' Soon thou wilt be curious about that new Christus of the Jews, who hath followers even in Rome."

"Pomponia knoweth much of them and declareth they seem to have true peace of mind," said Octavia earnestly. "She hath promised to take me some day—"

She stopped abruptly at a warning "psst" from

Pythias, who looking intently toward the opening in the hedge whispered, "Someone is spying!"

"Who is there?" Octavia called sharply.

There was a peculiar movement behind one of the ever-green lions as a subdued voice answered, "'Tis I—Eos," and a slave girl appeared in the opening. She was small and slight and walked as if one limb was shorter than the other. Her face, although of a strange pallor, was not without beauty, the features being regular, the eyes large and luminous, and the well-shaped head crowned by a mass of wavy brown hair. She came slowly up the path and saluting respectfully, stood with downcast eyes, as she said in a colorless voice:

"I crave the lady Octavia's pardon, but Eunice sent me to say the *prandium* is prepared, and that the tribune Marcus is waiting to learn if there are any orders."

"How long hast been hiding behind the hedge and listening?" said Pythias abruptly, regarding her with a keen look.

Beyond a slight quivering of the nostrils the girl appeared as unconscious of the question as if she were deaf.

"Why dost not answer the lady Pythias?" said Octavia not unkindly.

"She is not my mistress: the Augusta said I should be thy slave alone, and need obey none else, except Eunice and the *atriensis*. The lady Pythias always is suspecting me of evil—I would die rather than serve her," the girl replied with passionate emphasis.

"Thou art wrong to cherish such wicked thoughts, Eos," said Octavia with mild severity. "But come; I, thy mistress, now command thee to answer the question."

"I was neither hiding nor listening"—with an angry glance at Pythias: "I tripped and fell and it hurt so that I lay on the ground a moment."

"Thou liest," said Pythias calmly: "I watched thee creeping along the hedge, and saw thee slowly sink on thy knees behind the lion."

The girl flashed back a glance of bitter anger, but with remarkable self-control remained proudly silent.

Octavia shook her head regretfully: "Thou mayst go, Eos: say to Eunice we are coming directly and that the tribune shall be prepared an hour hence to escort us to the villa of Pomponia Græcina. Indeed, thou art over-hard with her, Pythias," she continued as the girl limped away. "I feel she is not strictly truthful, but always I remember she was made a cripple by my mother's chariot and perhaps hath been embittered by her suffering and misfortune—but for which she might have grown up happy and truthful, as surely she would have been beautiful."

"If I thought it were so and that only she lied now and then like the other girls, I could excuse," rejoined the other. "But she is vindictive and treacherous. She hateth me because thou lovest and trustest me and she hateth thee because 'twas thy mother's chariot which ran over her. Always she is plotting with the other girls over whom she hath some perverse influence. 'Tis the third time I have caught her spying. Some day she will do thee ill: if only thou wouldst ask the Augusta to place her elsewhere. At least, I shall do my best to make thee watchful: promise thou wilt consider?"

Octavia sighed. "I do not like to be suspicious: it poisons life which is sad enough at best."

"Then think of it not at all and trust me to be thy watchdog," said Pythias gaily, throwing an arm around her; "and come, let us hasten—I long to see the curly-haired tribune, who makes even the gloomy Miriam smile, and whom I would marry to-day were it not for thee—and Junius!"

A NOBLE ROMAN MATRON

IN the small courtyard at the southern wing of the palace two *sellæ*, resembling sedan chairs, the use of which had been introduced by the reigning Emperor, were waiting to convey the young girls to the city gate, where a carriage was to meet them for completion of the journey to the *domus rusticana* of Pomponia, on the Appian Way. Each chair was manned by four bearers, in the imperial red livery, and the *cortège* was completed by a little group of prætorians drawn up on either side.

Carelessly leaning against a column, the youthful Marcus, newly-appointed tribune of the palace guard, was watching with boyish amusement two large Molossian dogs which were romping about the enclosure in rough but good-natured play. His sleeveless white tunic, descending to the knees and girded at the waist by a red leather belt, from which hung a short sword, displayed to advantage his splendid muscular figure. Broad of shoulder, narrow at hips, deep-chested, with powerful arms and legs, of ruddy complexion, with dark laughing eyes and gleaming white teeth—from the crown of his handsome head, with its thick, clustering curls, to his feet clad in stout *soleæ*, or sandals, fastened with red thongs about his sturdy ankles, he satisfied the most exacting requirements of the ideal in manly strength and beauty in respect of which it was freely conceded he had few rivals among the ten thousand picked men who constituted the imperial guard. A centurion of the first cohort, in the main composed of patrician youths under twenty years, his courage, kindness and joyous temperament had made him the idol of his

command, from whom, under the Emperor's commission, he had selected a dozen stalwart youngsters as a body-guard for Cæsar's daughter. Each wore upon the fourth finger of the left hand the gold ring of knighthood: each regarded the "will of Cæsar" as the highest law—and each was convinced that upon his individual prowess and invincibility in no small measure depended the welfare and stability of the Roman State.

The frolicsome dogs had finally come to grips in the far corner of the area, and the larger, in emotional disregard of the ethics of their mutual understanding, sunk his teeth in the other one's ear deeper than was actually required under the circumstances. As the victim freed himself with a yelp of pain, the conscience-stricken aggressor turned and fled, hotly pursued by his irate companion. Thrice they raced madly around the courtyard, to the delight of the spectators, and then dashed directly up the broad staircase at the precise moment the *ostiarius* threw open the doors and advanced across the threshold. Running shoulder to shoulder the rangy beasts crashed into the unprepared janitor, who sprawled headlong down the steps. The chair carriers roared with laughter while the small boy in charge of the dogs, having fruitlessly attempted to stop their headlong flight up the staircase, dropped his whip and stood rooted to the pavement in horror.

Angered more by the jeers of the carriers than by the mishap itself, the janitor struggled to his feet, caught up the whip and, after lashing wildly but vainly at the dogs, turned savagely upon the boy, who in a paroxysm of fear bolted headlong into one of the chairs and burrowed among the cushions. From thence, shrieking loudly, he was speedily dragged by the angry slave, who began shaking and beating him; whereupon the excited dogs joyously hurled themselves upon both, and all fell to the ground in a confused writhing mass, from which proceeded screams, shouts of anger and deep-toned barking.

Yielding to his native love of fun, Marcus watched the struggle with grinning delight: the carriers leaned against the chair poles helpless with laughter, while the prætorians, all discipline forgotten in the Roman zest of whatsoever combat, crowded about the seething mass and egged on the frantic dogs with cheers and shouts of encouragement.

Attracted by the uproar, already the palace attendants had begun to gather, when at the height of the confusion Octavia and Pythias appeared in the doorway. For an instant they stood aghast; then with an anxious cry Pythias flew down the steps and forcing her way into the circle threw herself bodily upon the straining dogs—while Marcus, shouting a command to the guards, who drew back abashed, with one hand swung the janitor aside as if he were a bale of feathers, and with the other lifted the writhing boy by the neck and shook him gently as he whispered, “Cease thy howling—thy mistress hath come!”

The tumult subsided at once, and Pythias rose hastily—realizing for the first time that the clasps which fastened her *stola* at the shoulder having given way in her impetuous dash through the crowd, the garment had dropped away from her white, sleeveless inner *tunica* which reached only to the knees. Her face crimsoned as a slave hurriedly readjusted the robe: but she covered her confusion by stooping to embrace the fawning dogs. They were her personal property—brought from ancient Epirus and presented to her by Junius.

Octavia looked gravely at the uneasy tribune: “Who commanded thee to stage a beast combat and man hunt in the palace yard?” she said with pretended severity.

Marcus flushed scarlet, but met her eyes steadily as he answered, “I am mortified and without excuse, noble Octavia. And yet—I call the gods to witness it happened so aimlessly my wits failed—certainly none is to blame except my stupid self”: and he recounted the episode so graphically and with such compelling humor that the

prætorians were hard put to maintain their gravity, while the slaves giggled outright and Pythias gave way to unrestrained laughter.

Octavia turned aside to hide her own merriment. "Art hurt, Lydus?" she said kindly to the old *ostiarius*.

"Only in my feelings, noble Octavia," shamefacedly answered the janitor.

"And thou, Dio?" to the slave boy, who shook his head manfully while struggling to suppress his sobs.

"Well then," she said turning to the frowning *atriensis*, anxious to exercise his authority and impress his severity upon someone, "none is to be punished, except the dogs, which shall be taken to the kennels by Dio and fed—and the tribune of the guard, who now shall do penance for all the others"—smiling at Marcus, who dropping on his knees gratefully kissed the hand graciously extended to him.

The protesting dogs were dragged away, the janitor limped back to his *cella*, the onlookers were dispersed by the *atriensis*, while the prætorians sought their horses outside the exit. As the girls were being assisted to their chairs by the tribune, he covertly handed to each in turn a small tube containing a letter, whispering to Octavia, "From Lucius, Lady," and to the other, "A love poem from thy centurion."

A moment later a stifled exclamation issued simultaneously from behind the curtains of each chair; then Pythias cried sharply:

"Stop, stop—come hither, Marcus!" and as the tribune hurried towards her she said rapidly in an undertone, "Stupid! thou hast given her my letter!"—and then aloud, very sweetly, "Octavia hath taken my fan in mistake for her own: kindly make the exchange for me."

With a startled air Marcus took the fan in which Pythias deftly had concealed the scroll and bore it to Octavia, from whom he received another fan, similarly burdened, which he handed to Pythias.

"Surely thou art making a nice mess of thy first day's service," the girl whispered petulantly. "What is thy trouble to-day: hast fallen in love perchance?"

"Always am I upset by the little god Eros when near 'the little lady,'" he grinned back at her: whereat she withdrew behind the curtain in high dudgeon.

Preceded by the tribune and supported by the prætorians, riding on either side and at the rear, the *sellæ*, skirting the palace on the east turned into the Vicus Apollinis, dropped down into the Forum at the Summa Sacra Via and followed the latter to the Triumphal Street which swept around the eastern declivity of the Palatine Hill and intersected the Via Appia not far from the Porta Capena. The palace livery attracted instant attention from the passers-by and the loungers who had begun to congregate. Octavia was extremely popular and the news quickly spreading that she was abroad a great commotion ensued. The guards had their hands full keeping back the struggling crowds, eager to catch a glimpse of the Emperor's daughter—to kiss her hand—to beg her favors or intercession. The chairs were bombarded with flowers and wreaths—some of the more enthusiastic even attempting to toss articles of jewelry and personal trinkets over the apron, crying gaily "For good luck!" A roar of laughter greeted the accomplishment of a ragged boy, who, dodging between the horses succeeded in depositing a small kitten in one of the chairs: and when Octavia, leaning forward to pick up the little animal, dropped a flower into the urchin's grimy fist, the applause was deafening.

The crowd lessened after leaving the Sacred Street, and the bearers falling into a trot soon reached the gate, where transfer was quickly made to a light roomy carriage drawn by Gallic horses. Near the third milestone, not far from the beautiful Tomb of Cæcilia Metella the *reda* turned into a shaded road which bore to the east and, after winding through a grove of plane trees festooned with ivy, climbed a gentle ascent of grassland studded

with splendid elms, and drew up at the vestibule of Pomponia's villa.

It was about the tenth hour, and the master and mistress of the house, preferring the old customs to modern fashions, were at the *cena*, as the visitors were informed by a fat grinning slave who came waddling around the corner at the sound of the approaching carriage. Octavia forbade the *atriensis*, who quickly appeared, to announce them. "No, Gallus," she said, with her winning smile, "they must not be interrupted. Besides, it will be pleasant to surprise them: take us to the *peristylum*—if that is where they go after dining."

"Not so, noble Octavia," replied the slave; "they are in the *vernum triclinium*," waving his hand toward the east wing, in which was located the dining room for use in the spring, "and thence will go directly to the little *porticus* on the terrace, where already the corn is waiting for the lady Pomponia to feed the pigeons."

"That is even better," said Pythias eagerly; "we can feed them while waiting"; and renewing her caution Octavia led the way stealthily around the west wall, the old slave watching benignantlly, while a huge mastiff rose from his mat in the *ostium* and stalked gravely after them.

Pomponia's little *domus* was almost completely surrounded by the grasslands and orchards of a large country estate owned by the Quintillian family, and thus at once isolated and insured against encroachment. Nestling at the foot of a wooded knoll, the land in front of the house sloped away gently to the broad Campagna. The turbulent city was curtained by the rising ground behind the grove of planes on the northwest, while from every other point of view beautiful rolling meadows, shining villas, gleaming waters and blooming orchards filled the nearer vision, the tombs and monuments scattered along the ancient road peeping through the vistas to the south, with the Alban Mountains looming in their hazy beauty on beyond.

The villa had its own little orchard of cherries, peaches, apricots, plums and pears, the trees now fragrant with blossoms and its flower garden enclosed in a close-clipped hedge, with vegetables growing in a similar enclosure beyond; while a limpid brook, after babbling down from the woods, spread out into a good-sized pond where stately swans were floating and other aquatic fowl splashing about. The subdued lowing of the cattle, the tremulous bleating of sheep and the raucous braying of donkeys floating up from distant pastures, contributed to the bucolic semblance of the spot, which in its serene and peaceful beauty and repose was in harmony with both the spirit and desires of its virtuous and noble-minded owner. Here Pomponia had made her home continuously during her husband's protracted absence in Gaul and Britain; choosing it as a residence in preference to the town house owned by Plautius in the fashionable *Carinæ* on the Esquiline.

Pausing as they came to the terrace, Octavia caught Pythias by the hand and stood entranced with the beauty of the scene.

"Oh! it is so lovely," she cried rapturously, her eyes becoming misty—"so restful, so full of peace! How I would love to stay here with Pomponia and learn the secret of her happiness and content. Oh! that dreadful palace, with its falsehood, its pretense and its wickedness: it frightens and suffocates me."

Pythias took her in her arms. "Don't," she whispered, caressing the dark head which fell weakly on her shoulder; "it will be different soon—when thou art married and have Lucius to lean upon. And even now we can come here often—I will go to the Augusta about it to-morrow; she loveth thee and always is good to me."

Octavia shuddered a little, then lifted her head and said with a faint smile, "I am a miserable, selfish coward and deserve to be punished with the leaden balls. Thou shouldst have been the princess and I thy humble slave.

But come—there are the pigeons, frantic for their supper.”

With swish of pinions and unctuous cooing, the birds were pouring down from the red-tiled roofs and strutting about the terrace; and a few moments later Pomponia and the General started with surprise at sight of the young girls kneeling on the green carpet with the swarming pigeons eagerly contending for the grain in their extended hands.

“My dear child, how camest thou here?” cried Pomponia, in glad surprise, tenderly kissing Octavia, who threw herself into the extended arms—then welcoming Pythias with similar warmth. The old General was no less cordial, and said gallantly, “By Pollux, and I were a few years younger, Pomponia, I would barter my promised triumph for the embraces thou hast received.”

“Then take the greeting without the sacrifice, in order that thy triumph shall be complete, General,” said Pythias archly, as she kissed him precipitately; while Octavia smilingly extended her hand which the old soldier respectfully saluted with military stiffness.

“Who attended thee from the palace?” enquired Plautius; “surely Cæsar’s daughter and this dangerous fire-brand have not been permitted to wander alone into the Campagna?”

“The tribune Marcus with his guards came with us,” answered Octavia; “they are waiting near the wood at the foot of the slope.”

The General clapped his hands and as a slave came running said to Octavia, “Command thy tribune to come at once and pay his respects to thy friends”; and turning to Pythias continued, “Let us first satisfy, as may be, these rapacious birds”; and they scattered the remainder of the corn on the grass below the terrace—Pythias reserving the last few kernels for those more venturesome of the feathered pets which perched upon her shoulders and contended for a foothold on her arms.

The General greeted Marcus warmly. "I knew and esteemed thy father—we fought together under Germanicus: the army mourned when he fell. He lacked thy height and breadth of shoulder, but the test of trial and the spears of adversity alone may prove whether thou hast inherited his courage and lofty spirit—although some measure of each must be conceded to one who adventures thy present service"—with a sly glance at Pythias, who tossed her head defiantly. "But what is more to the point, Rufius tells me thou art justly of high repute among the prætorians."

The young man colored with mingled pleasure and embarrassment, replying ingenuously, "I thank thee, General. Indeed it were a high aim to emulate my father in manly traits, and even to approximate the goal would signify high favor of the gods. I have sorrowed at being kept so long in the Camp on the Esquiline, instead of going to school with thy legions in the west."

"Trouble not," said Plautius, with pleased emphasis. "Be sure the opportunity will come, and that the fires will be kindled against thee—to temper or destroy, as the gods will. But now let us to the triclinium for a cup of chilled old Falernian wherewith to wash the dust from thy throat—and fortify against the nagging art bound to receive on the home journey from this mischief-maker, who is listening so greedily."

"First, help Octavia and me with the lady Pomponia," said Pythias coaxingly. "We have a great favor to beg in which thou art concerned deeply. Marcus can wait a little for that 'destroying fire' from the amphora."

"There it comes already," said the General with a laugh. "I saw at a glance her heel ever is on thy neck. 'Tis pity Varus is not here to bridle and restrain her."

Pythias deigned no answer other than to shake his arm reprovingly as she hurried them to the portico, where Pomponia and Octavia were engaged in earnest conversation.

It happened that Marcus was yet to meet Pomponia, who rarely was seen in the city—never at the palace or in attendance at the games or public amusements. Every one knew she was a woman of singular merit and irreproachable conduct—who preferred to dwell in the upper story than in the cellar of her earthly tenement. But austerity was not then in vogue, and the ancient Roman virtue was so far removed, in its precepts and practices, from the prevailing ethical concepts and the licentiousness of the time, that, for the most part, its occasional display aroused only a feeling of surprise, if not distrust—or at best of awe, rather than of admiration and approval.

Prepared to find a timid, retiring little lady, sad-eyed and melancholy, the tribune was overcome by the appearance of the noble-looking matron who confronted him. Robed in black, without a single ornament, and wearing no garland, her grey hair parted in the middle and confined in a simple knot behind, of medium height and slender figure, still retaining its graceful curves, her face cast in the fine patrician mold, unfurrowed by time, with soft brown eyes, a firm sweet mouth and a complexion of ivory-white—it needed only the gracious womanly smile with which she extended her hand, and the full rich voice in which her welcome was uttered, to complete his bewilderment.

The young tribune floundered awkwardly in his effort to make fitting rejoinder to Pomponia's kindly greeting—to the unbounded delight of Pythias who shrewdly apprehended the cause of his confusion, and mischievously ignored his obvious signal for help. But the matter-of-fact General, quite unobservant, unconsciously came to his assistance by directing Pythias to "prefer her request at once and no longer obstruct two soldiers in the gratification of their desire and the fulfillment of their duty to pour a libation to Vesta."

“’Tis for thee to speak, Octavia,” said the other, “and may the gods give thee true eloquence.”

Pomponia listened with grave interest to the Augusta’s plan—then shook her head regretfully. “I am too old and sober-minded for such diversions, Octavia dear, and would only affront the holiday spirit by obtruding my melancholy visage and somber attire in the front seats. Always the spectacles gave me pain—I chill at the sight of bloody contention. Perchance my cousin Græcinus, the father of thy little friend Agricola, was right when he said I was lacking in true Roman spirit.”

“But the Circensian Games are not like the sports in the Amphitheatre,” pleaded Pythias eagerly. “There will be no fighting: and surely thou wouldst like to see Britannicus in the military harness of which he is so proud, riding in the sham battle. Thou knowest ’tis our first festival and that we must sit alone with tiresome old Eunice unless thou comest, when we may invite Silanus and—and—Quintilla”—

“And—and—the young Varus,” said Plautius mockingly.

Pythias blushed a little, but rejoined stoutly, “Yes and Junius—who declares if he can’t see me once in a while he’ll disgrace his family by marrying a freedwoman and opening a wine shop in the *subura*.”

“I know, I know,” said Pomponia smiling sadly, “but truly I cannot bring myself to do what thou dost ask, my dear: surely thou at least canst understand?” with an appealing glance at Octavia.

But the latter shook her head in turn: “My father charged me to say that never hath Imperial Rome conferred upon a subject such notable honor as that which thy husband will receive at his triumph to-morrow; that it will be Plautius, not Claudius, who will be acclaimed at the Games—those were his very words; that a good wife should not appear indifferent to the successes of her

husband, and finally that while he would command the attendance of any other woman in Rome, he pays thee the signal honor of only requesting thy presence."

"And the Augusta bade me say," Pythias broke in impetuously, "that if the lady Pomponia should seem obdurate, she commended the General for once in his life to exercise his right of *manus*, to the dutiful recognition of which every Roman maid binds herself when first she kindles the fire on the home altar!"

"*Perpol*, Messalina is right," cried Plautius with a hearty laugh. "But I prefer not compelling my Caia—and I may coax her. Canst do it this once for me—and these children, Pomponia?" he said with great gentleness, taking her hand. "'Tis as the fire-brand says: there will be no blood-letting on the third day nor anything to shock thy sensitive spirit."

The fine brown eyes filled with tears as the grizzled old soldier leaned over and ceremoniously kissed her soft, white hand, and her lips trembled: but she forced a smile and turning to Octavia said bravely, "Tell Cæsar I thank him and obey his request—for the greater pleasure of those I love."

"Thou hast a noble spirit, Pomponia," said Plautius with a proud smile, pressing her hand tenderly: "small credit to me that thou art the only woman who hast found a place in my life."

"And truly I know not which of you I love the most," cried Pythias, her eyes shining with ardent admiration. "I used to think that no one could be worthy of thee, dearest lady; but today"—demurely, and with a saucy glance at the grim-visaged veteran—"I have seen a man, who with proper tutelage to soften his asperities, might bring happiness to the noblest woman in Rome!"

For a moment he regarded her quizzically: then, with a suspicion of huskiness in his voice, said to the attentive tribune, "Come, Marcus, my throat is parched as the

Libyan desert—let us to the house before another storm breaks.”

“Be not overlong, General,” called Octavia; “already we should be on our way to the City.”

Squaring his shoulders and compressing his lips in mock sternness, Plautius answered with a frown:

“Now, by the Divine Brothers will I endure no more orders in my own house today—even from Cæsar’s daughter”; and taking the laughing Marcus by the arm, marched stiffly toward the house. Pomponia, half regretting her promise, half rejoicing in it, put her arms around her exultant young friends—Octavia tearfully grateful and caressing, while Pythias whispered whimsically:

“Thou has taught me for all time that a woman who truly loves is not unwilling to obey—sometimes!”

A DAY IN THE GREAT CIRCUS

AT an early hour of the tenth day before the Kalends of May in the year 800 A. U. C., the heavy oaken doors of a wine shop in the *subura* were flung back and the proprietor stepped across the threshold at the moment a distant cry quavered up from the direction of the Forum. The night chill was in the air, and hastily re-entering Felix Bulla drew on a heavy woolen toga, then returned to await the oncoming crier.

Devoted to its present uses the greater part of a century, during which it had been handed down from father to son through four generations, the wine shop was a noted one. It stood at the corner of two streets diagonally opposite one of the ancient shrines to the Lares Compitales. Originally established for the worship of the protecting deities, these "neighborhood shrines" at the street-crossings ultimately became the centers of informal political clubs, which Julius Cæsar found so difficult to control that he attempted to abolish them. The first Emperor more tactfully gave them official recognition by decreeing that between the figures of the Lares there should be placed the "Genius" of Augustus—the old animistic concept of the divine parallel. Thereafter, worship of the Lares involved that of the ideal of the Emperor, whose god-like attributes and tendency thus insensibly became a part of the attendant discussions. The proximity of the shrine contributed largely to the prosperity of the Bulla family's enterprise, which had flourished uninterruptedly until Claudius, in a spasm of virtue,



THE CIRCUS MAXIMUS

decreed certain restrictions against wine shops, temporarily as effective as they were unpopular.

Felix listened with a scowl as the call of the crier became audible summoning all good people to the Games, the *Ludi Sæculares*, in commemoration of another century of the city's endurance—pompously characterized as “a spectacle never before seen by any living citizen, nor to be repeated during the life of anyone now living!”

“Hola, Sergius, what meanest thou by such lies?” cried Felix wrathfully, as the crier approached.

“Now the gods be praised,” exclaimed the youth joyously; “my throat is on edge with all this shouting in the cold air, and I shall pour a libation to Morpheus for arousing thee in time to serve thy nephew with a cup of *calda*.”

“Not for a million *sestertii* would I broach an amphora or heat the water, even if the draught would save thee a journey down the Styx,” grimly rejoined Felix. “Thy parched throat deserves to be utterly consumed for the utterance of such monstrous falsehoods. Thyself hath heard thine own grandfather, among others still living, tell of these same *Ludi* celebrated by the wise Augustus, after a most exact calculation of the years, as Claudius in his own history hath writ—in which Eunice, the old dancer who appeared on the stage yesterday, herself performed. That was sixty-three years this very day. And now comes this imbecile Claudius—who is ruining the wine shops while he virtuously gets himself drunk with his wantons in the palace—with his senseless double lie about another century gone and a kind of spectacle never before enjoyed by living person! Thou art a fool to repeat the lie—and thy father's son shouldst be ashamed thus to serve the tyrant who is ruining the Bulla family!”

Sergius grinned broadly. “Truly hast thou slept ill to be thus crabbed on a holiday, uncle, and art unreasonable in thy anger. I cry what I am paid to cry: and thou likest it not, 'tis upon Cæsar, the prefect of the city and

the Editor of the Games thou shouldst pour thy rage, rather than upon thy dutiful nephew—who did not inherit a wine shop, and so needs gold even more than thou,” he added slyly, while discreetly sheering off to continue his journey up the hill.

The crowd which had assembled and listened with delight to the colloquy, after loudly cheering the departing crier shouted a volley of gibes, jeers and good-natured banter at the irate Bulla, who glared defiantly for a moment, then bolted into the shop, slamming the doors as he muttered sourly, “Let the fools all go to the imitation show: I would not stir a foot even for the pleasure of seeing old Manlius lose his money and claw the air if the Greens are beaten in the races—as I hope they will be; and may Hecate fly away with them all!”

From the noise and bustle with which the great city already began to hum it was manifest that the discontent of the old tavern keeper was not shared by the populace to whom it mattered nothing which was correct: the ordinary computation of eight centuries since the foundation of the city, or the pontifical tradition, accepted by Augustus, which antedated the event by sixty-three years. It was the fact of the spectacle, not the sentiment of the anniversary, which appealed to them: give them *panem et circenses* (bread and games) and they cared nothing about the centuries. So that while they had laughed contemptuously when in his servile address to Claudius the Consul observed, “Mayst thou often repeat these celebrations!” never had a greater crowd assembled in Rome than attended the triumph of Aulus Plautius, which had been made a part of the solemnities, and never had there been such a struggle for admission to the Circus as on the first two days of the Games. Everything had been on a scale of extraordinary splendor, and on this last day of the celebration everyone was possessed of a single aim—to be one of the lucky two hundred and fifty thousand who would find seats in the Circus, rather than among the mil-

lion who would restlessly throng the streets and haunt the neighborhood after vainly struggling for admission.

The Circus Maximus, which occupied the valley between the Palatine and Aventine hills, was the most stupendous building ever erected for public spectacles. It was a vast oblong, six hundred feet wide and more than two thousand in length, ending in a hemi-cycle at the east and squared off at the west by a massive structure termed the *oppidum*, from its external resemblance to a walled town. Here the main entrance, the so-called *Porta pompae*, or Processional Gateway, was located, the immense bronze gates opening into a huge tunnel, which pierced the *oppidum* from west to east. On either side of this passageway were the stalls for the chariots, termed *carceres*, and above them the numberless apartments incidental to the uses of the building.

The space provided for the Games was in the form of an ellipse cut in half at its vertical axis. Two thirds of the area was devoted to the race course which was bisected longitudinally by a low wall termed the *spina*, at either end of which were the *metae* or turning posts, composed of three conical pillars set on a semi-circular plinth. The *spina*, about seventeen hundred feet long, was crowned with images of the gods, ornamental shrines and other figurative emblems, with a huge obelisk rising from the center. Separated from the area by a canal ten feet wide—interposed to safeguard the spectators from intrusion by wild beasts seeking escape from their tormentors—the seats in three immense tiers rose to a great height on all sides except in the *oppidum*, on the west. The ancient structure had been beautified and enlarged by Claudius: the tufa of the entrance and the *carceres* replaced with white marble, columns of bronze substituted for the wooden *metae*, and the first tier of seats—of which fifty thousand additional were provided—was rebuilt of stone in place of wood, the lower rows reformed into boxes reserved for the magistrates and important personages,

who theretofore sat promiscuously with the other spectators.

In one of these boxes adjoining on the left the imperial balcony, which was directly opposite the starting point of the races, Octavia and her friends, accompanied by Pomponia, who had spent the night at the palace, had assembled early. On the final day of the spectacle the races were scheduled to begin at sunrise; at the first break of day the great gates had been thrown wide, and fully a half hour before the appointed time, with the exception of a few reserved places, every seat in the vast auditorium was filled and the perspiring policemen were clearing the gateway area against the arrival of the imperial party.

The young girls were radiant with happiness. Frequently they had attended the mimes and farces in the theatres, and the athletic contests in the *stadia*; and in the amphitheatres had watched breathlessly the strife between wild beasts, the combats of gladiators and other shocking contentions—in comparison with which latter the events scheduled for the day might be considered commonplace and tame. But the present occasion had its peculiar charm in that it was their first attendance at the only public place in Rome where men and women were allowed to sit together; thus, as it were, marking their emancipation from girlhood through an experience which has its special appeal to the youthful feminine mind—a first appearance in public with the chosen one of the opposite sex.

Sitting in the front row with Pomponia and Quintilla—whom Octavia mischievously had insisted upon inviting—with Lucius and Junius at their shoulders and Marcus and his prætorians in soldierly attendance at the rear, they stared in rapt wonder at the tremendous living panorama—eighty miles of benches, if extended in a single line, pulsating with human energy—which throbbed and

seethed in a crescendo of noise and excitement as the hour approached. Senators in their broad purple stripes, nobles with their ladies, garbed in white and crowned with garlands, the colleges of priests, boys with their *pædagogi* or slave attendants, regiments of soldiers, married plebeians, citizens of all classes in holiday attire, and the populace in general—Greeks, Egyptians, Jews, Syrians, Gauls, Britons, Germans, a motley crowd of all nations and costumes—actuated by a single emotion, that of intense partisanship to one or another of the four great factions of the charioteers. Perhaps in all that vast assemblage the only person, who was not thus absorbed in the fortunes of the “Greens” or the “Blues”—the “Whites” or the “Reds,” might have been found in the box of honor resplendent with its crimson hangings and cushions, to the right of the imperial balcony, where the noble Agrippina, attired in white, her dark hair entwined with deep red roses, was quietly conversing with Vibidia and the other Vestal Virgins. Almost all of those present had wagered something, many of them had bet heavily on the outcome of the races: the calm-faced daughter of Germanicus had staked her ambition—that is to say her all, upon the successful appearance of her son in the Trojan game.

Following the ancient custom, on each day of the celebration images of the gods and of the imperial family deified were carried in solemn procession from the Capitol to the Circus—the opening of the Games awaiting arrival of the *cortège* with Claudius marching at the head. The excitement indoors kept pace with the oncoming uproar from without which grew louder and louder as the procession approached the *oppidum*. Every eye was focused in lively curiosity upon the imperial podium, with its oaken chair for Cæsar and its *pulvinar*, or cushioned seat, for the Empress—the rumor having spread that Messalina, who thus far had not shown herself at the Games would attend that day with Claudius in defiance of a

Senatorial decree in the time of Augustus which prohibited the Augusta from sitting with the Emperor at the Games and assigned her to a seat with the Vestals.

But Messalina did not appear—the imperial party including only Aulus Plautius, the Consul Vitellius and Rufinus, the prætorian prefect. As Claudius entered, the entire assemblage rose and received him by clapping their hands in measured cadence. For a moment the Emperor stared vacuously: then, raising his hand for silence, he pressed the reluctant Plautius to the front, crying loudly:

“Behold the conqueror!”

It was the General’s first public appearance since, invested with the triumphal robe and the laurel crown, he had ridden to the Capitol, Claudius walking beside the horse—the greatest honor ever conferred on a subject by imperial Rome. For an instant the astounded spectators gazed in silence at the martial figure in the white *tunica palmata*, which confronted them: then the cry of “Plautius, Plautius—the *Triumphator*,” which burst from the occupants of the nearby boxes and was taken up on every side, rolling along the benches and thundering up through the tiers, to culminate in one mighty acclaim “*Salve Victor—Salve Plautius Invictus*” (Hail to the Victor: Hail Plautius, the unconquered.)

The overhang of the balcony cut off its occupants from the view of those in the nearby boxes below; and the excited Pythias, after nearly plunging into the arena in a vain endeavor to catch a glimpse of the General by leaning far over the rail, leaped upon the carved stone coping, and clinging with one hand to the astonished Junius, dexterously shot her garland into the podium, crying in her clear treble, “*Salve homo—Hail to the man, and a greeting from the Dea Murcia!*” Then amidst the laughter and applause of those who had observed, she jumped down and with flashing eyes and cheeks flaming cried to Pomponia, “How proud thou shouldst be—and how glad that thou camest!”

"Truly art thou skillful in throwing flowers, Pythias," said Lucius with a smile; "but 'twas *down*, not *up* that I saw thee toss them once"—with a meaning smile at Junius.

"Yes, I remember," she answered demurely, "but since then have I been looking higher!"

"*Perpol*, the Lady Pomponia needs have a care, or she will find herself first divorced and then a widow; because if any robs me, he shall have a quick journey down the Styx," said Junius with a frown.

"If never thou slayest except for that cause, as well cast thy useless sword into the Cloaca," whispered Pythias as she clasped him gently by the arm.

The young man started, and Pythias shrunk back at a daring something she saw in his eyes; but as Junius was pressing towards her there came a tremendous cheer at the appearance of the white flag which the Editor, from his *suggestum* directly over the main entrance, flung out upon the course as the opening signal. The Games were on!

As the *mappa* fell upon the sand, some attendants appeared with a coil of whitened rope. Attaching one end of the cord to a ring in the wall below Cæsar's balcony, on the north or Palatine side of the course, they drew it across to the south wall to which the other end was fastened. Thus stretched at right angles to the *spina* and passing directly in front of the pillared goal, this *alba linea* constituted the starting line of the race—as it marked the finish also. The start was from west to east, with the *spina* always to the left of the racers; and the *carceres* were so located that the distance from each exit to the center of the track as it straightened away beyond the turn was equalized. Thus when as usually, although not invariably, the start was from the *carceres*, none had an advantage as to distance, in the common effort to win the coveted position next the inner wall.

Respectively wearing the colors of the contending factions, attendants in couples were stationed in front of

the *carceres*, the folding doors of which were flung open at the blast of a trumpet, and amidst a storm of cheers the four quadrigæ dashed forth and raced madly across the arena toward the starting line, some five hundred feet away. Converging more and more as they neared the rope and for the moment running evenly, the question of precedence at the rail depended almost entirely upon the individual nerve and confidence of the *aurigæ* or drivers. In the present instance, all were noted for their skill, courage and coolness, and each seemed recklessly determined not to swerve one hair from the direct line; until just as the rope fell and apparently at the last instant before an inevitable mass collision, the three on the right swerved in that direction, leaving number one, who wore the Green, at the wall—while the Circus fairly rocked with the triumphant shouts of the partisans of the *prasina*, at that period by far the most popular faction in Rome. In the earlier history of the Circus there were but two select companies (*factiones*) of circus-purveyors, identified with the White, *albata*, and the Red, *russata*: under Augustus the Blue, *venata*, came in, while Caligula added the *prasina*, the Green, in the fortunes of which the mad Emperor became so obsessed that it was freely charged that on more than one occasion he had poisoned the cleverest drivers of rival factions who threatened the success of his favorites.

Down the south course the racers tore abreast: the drivers in low close-fitting caps and short sleeveless tunics of their representative colors, torso and legs laced about with leather thongs, reins looped tightly around their waists, with faces set and every muscle tense, brandishing a combination of whip and goad—the bronze-bound two-wheeled carts rocking from side to side—the splendid horses, the middle ones yoked together, the other two attached only by traces, with streaming manes and tails, heads thrust forward and nostrils distended, straining every nerve, while urged to still greater effort both by the

aurigæ and the attendant *iubilatores*, one with each chariot—the quarter million of partisans and opponents splitting the air in a frenzy of exultant cheers and frantic encouragement! By desperate efforts the outside contestants speedily made good the distance lost in their wider turn at the first goal, repeating the performance at the second turn; and when after again passing the starting line the four, still abreast, went thundering down, the vast audience was in a state of delirium.

Upon a horizontal bar at the top of a short column which projected above the *spina* near the first goal were seven egg-shaped balls, painted red, while seven gilded dolphins rested upon a similar support at the west end of the wall. As the chariots passed the second goal one ball and one dolphin were taken down simultaneously, similar removals marking the completion of each succeeding round. Again and again the most determined and reckless attempts were made by the others to take the rail from the Green—more than once with momentary promise of success. But at the critical moment the four Cappadocian stallions never failed, and their driver still held his advantage as the sixth dolphin came down. Halfway down the final stretch in a last mad effort under whip and goad two of the chariots came together with a crash. The drivers were thrown out and to avoid the struggling horses massed in confusion, the fourth racer was compelled to swing far to the right, while the favorite increased his lead and as the last ball and fish disappeared swung across the finish an easy winner. He was halfway down the course again, before regaining control of his flying stallions; then preceded by his *iubilator*, loudly proclaiming the names of the winner and his horses, amidst the triumphant applause of his partisans he completed the circuit at a smart trot and after pausing to salute the Emperor, drew up in front of the Editor's box to receive his reward—a plethoric bag of gold.

Race after race followed in quick succession. Always

there were four competitors, but sometimes the chariots were of the *bigae*, or *trigae* variety, respectively drawn by two or three horses. With short intermissions at the third and fifth hours, by midday twelve events had been completed, the Greens winning all but four which were divided between the Reds and the Blues.

During the long intermission the imperial party and most of the box holders withdrew. Of the mass of spectators the greater part held their places, while those fortunate enough to have slaves to reserve their seats sought the refreshment stalls in the basement on the Palatine side, or wandered up and down the corridors, wrangling over the events of the morning, or discussing and placing bets on those to come.

The dusty course had been thoroughly sprinkled when the hour elapsed. The white flag was thrown out and the program proceeded with a series of races between *desultores*, bare-back riders, each with two mounts from which periodically they jumped back and forth while running at full speed. It was a dangerous sort of undertaking, for that very reason especially popular both because of the attendant uncertainty and consequent added zest in the betting and the brutal delight of the Roman mob in human suffering and death. And in the very first event before completion of the third round the Red and Green riders fell and were badly trampled.

The closing number was the "Manumission race," the winner being awarded his freedom instead of the customary bag of gold. It was the prize most coveted by the *aurigæ*, all of whom were slaves, and the various Factions reserved their best horses and put forward their most skillful and popular drivers for the contest, which accordingly roused the spectators to the highest pitch of excitement and evoked the most intense partisanship.

Emerging from the *carceres* at a smart trot, the four contestants swung across the arena, and halting abreast in front of the podium saluted the Emperor; then wheeling

to the south they were ranged in a line drawn at such an angle as to equalize, so far as possible, the distance of each from the starting line. The Green, driving four spirited chestnuts from northern Greece was number one, the Red and Blue with Mauretanian bays came next, and on the right the White behind a quartette of mettlesome blacks of Sicilian breed. "Hola, the *Cornix*!" a shrill voice shouted derisively from the Green partisans in a nearby middle tier; and the quip was passed along the benches with roars of laughter.

"By Hercules," said Junius, shrewdly appraising the wiry blacks, "methinks these 'crows' will prove eagles in the race and I am minded to bet on the White."

"The Green, the Green—for the honor of Greece," cried Pythias; "name thy wager—and it is within my purse"—extending her betting card with flashing eyes.

Seizing the stylus, Varus wrote hastily on the *libellus*, and read aloud with a flourish; "The Cornix to win against the Green: Junius Varus wagers with the lady Pythias his life and devotion against a kiss. Understood, if he wins he shall pay also!"

"Thou art absurd," said Pythias with flaming cheeks—"erase thy foolish scrawl," and even the sedate Pomponia joined in the general laugh as Quintilla cried gleefully, "Thou hast caught her fairly, Junius, and if the coward backs out, I'll take the bet myself!"

"Hold him to it—Lucius says the Green is bound to win; and then there will be no more fear of the 'Traulus girl' nor talk of the Vestals," Octavia whispered half in mischief, half seriously.

For an instant Pythias stared disdainfully at the giggling Quintilla, then turning to Lucius said defiantly, "Well then, let the bet stand; but after Glaucus and the chestnuts win, thou shalt learn it were easier to endure the torture of Ixion's wheel than the pains I shall exact from thee in payment."

"Long ago I made the payment—and already have

known the pains, as well thou knowest," said Junius earnestly in a low voice, covertly seeking her hand; but on the instant came the blast of a trumpet and the air was rent by a thunderous cheer as the chariots dashed forward.

The chestnuts were not at their best in a start from position, and halfway down the arena the Red and Blue led them in a neck and neck struggle for the inner track, number two finally winning by inches, the Green taking the third position, inside the White. In this order the starting line was crossed and the first goal turned; then in an extraordinary burst of speed the Blue forged ahead, only to be passed halfway down the stretch by the Green, whose horses now were running superbly. One by one the balls and dolphins came down, with no diminution of the intensity of the struggle; the roar from the benches grew louder and louder, its mighty diapason more and more portentous as again and again the precedence shifted—with salvos of cheers and frantic shouts of encouragement for the favorites in their varying fortunes, and volleys of taunts and jeers for the "Crow," who from the start never ventured to better his position.

Just before turning the goal at the end of the fifth round, the Green again took the lead and by persistent use of the whip succeeded in maintaining it throughout the entire circuit—the feat arousing his partisans to a state bordering on madness.

"Thou hast lost, foolish one," cried Pythias, radiant with delight, as the sixth dolphin came down with the chestnuts still leading; "freedom is not for the 'Crow,' and soon thyself shall feel the sting of slavery."

"Already have I felt the sting, at thy caprice, but this time 'tis thou who shalt pay," Junius answered grimly, without taking his eyes from the racers. "I tell thee, Pythias, I shall win! Watch the blacks, now: the others are about to see their heels—ah! the Crow, the

Crow—ten thousand *sestertii* on the Cornix!” he shouted in uncontrollable excitement.

It happened in an instant. After the goal had been turned for the final circuit, the Blue, his horses at the wheel of the favorite, made a determined effort to pass, and as the two momentarily drew away from the others, like a flash the White darted across and fell in directly behind the Green: so that when the Blue, unable to maintain the terrific pace, sought his former position, he found it preëmpted by the despised Cornix, and was forced to take an outer course. In another moment the significance of the move became apparent. Maintained at top speed from the beginning—six and a half kilometers having been covered in twenty minutes—the pace had begun to tell upon the leading fours; and when the Blue dropped back—to fall in again behind, as assumed by the leader, the latter eased up his horses in preparation for the turn and the expected struggle down the home stretch. It was the opportunity for which patiently the Crow had been waiting and restraining his impatient steeds. Leaning over the apron he slacked the reins and emitted a piercing whistle; and as the blacks leaped forward, sheering to the right on a curve with the narrowest possible margin, he swung around the unprepared leader and took the wall at the very point of the *meta*. Completing the turn in safety, he uttered a shout of triumph, and carelessly throwing away his whip, which indeed had never been used, with sharp passionate cries urged the sinewy blacks to their highest endeavor. Almost abreast, the exasperated Green, in a frenzy of desperation was lashing the gallant chestnuts cruelly, while the air vibrated in the terrific storm of cheers, shrieks, groans, imprecations and frantic appeals to the gods through which the impassioned spectators, all on their feet, gave vent to their fervid excitement.

But the chestnuts were laboring, while the powerful

blacks still had an ounce in reserve which their skillful driver knew how and when to command. Lengthening their stride in a final display of matchless speed, they flew down the course like an eagle dropping to its prey, and whirled around the goal as the last dolphin came down—the Green struggling desperately three clear lengths behind!

Alas for their proud and elated master—in the delimitation of whose fate the implacable *Parcæ* had all but finished their task; it remaining only for *Atropos*, The Inflexible, to cut the thread which had been spun and its length determined by her inscrutable sisters! As the line was crossed, his horses still running madly, incautiously releasing one hand from the reins and turning to the left where away up in the topmost benches he knew a little dark-haired woman and two sturdy boys were staring down with wildly beating hearts, he snatched the white cap from his head and waved it joyously. At the fatal instant the yoke gave way, and as the pole struck the ground he pitched over the wheel directly in the path of the oncoming chariot. Drawing from his waist band the *falx*, a curved knife provided for such an emergency, he made a brave effort to cut the entangling reins. But it was too late. One fleeting glimpse of freedom—then beneath the trampling hoofs and the wheel of his defeated rival came the last great manumission.

Pythias stared in white-faced pity as the mangled remains were borne away by the attendants, while Octavia, with an arm around the horrified Pomponia, tearfully whispered a few words to Lucius, who left the box and hurried to the podium. A few moments later loud-voiced criers, riding down each side of the circus repeated the Editor's proclamation: "Cæsar decrees that on a marble tablet affixed to the *spina* the name of the victor, as a citizen of Rome, and the names of his horses shall be inscribed; and from the purse of Octavia the dead man's wife and children shall receive their freedom and a talent of silver!"

Wild shouts of approval and noisy acclaim of Octavia rolled down from the fickle mob, which, enraged by the defeat of the favorite, a moment before had been gloating over the victor's death. Shrinking back, abashed, Octavia looked reproachfully at Lucius. "Nay," he said earnestly, "I gave Cæsar the very words of thy message: he himself declared the gift should be in thy name"; while Pomponia caressed her hand and Pythias, with flushed cheeks and dewy eyes cried passionately, "I love thee for it—always thou thinkest of others; and it will lighten the burden of my payment."

"If only two or three more despicable slaves are killed and their *contubernales* manumitted she will be throwing herself into thy arms, Junius," Quintilla whispered scornfully; to the intense amusement of the calloused young noble, whose delight in the outcome of the race, it must be admitted, was not in the slightest degree lessened by its tragic ending.

From the entablature of the *oppidum* shadows had begun to fall upon the arena when, at the end of the fourth intermission, the trumpet pealed for the closing event, and a great hush fell as the Trojan Game was staged.

Preceded by a band of trumpeters, a cavalcade of young men and boys, the flower of the Roman youth, came riding in and deployed in three troupes upon the arena. In military harness, their corselets richly gilt, with gold chains about their necks and crowned with chaplets, each rider bore two spears of cornel-wood, headed with iron—a few with polished quivers on their shoulders. Each troupe had its captain, attended by twelve marshals. The leader of the first division, personating young Priam, was mounted on a dappled white Thracian horse; Iulus, on a horse from Tyre—of the same breed as that which beautiful Queen Dido sent to the father whose son he impersonated—commanded the second, while the third, composed of boys, was led by the stripling Atys, astride a Trinacrian pony.

Nervous and embarrassed at the outset, the youthful warriors regained confidence under the generous measure of applause showered upon them—particularly from the boxes, and the benches occupied by the soldiers. Dividing into equal bands “by threes,” they march in diverging lines; then, on order, wheel about and charge with lances in rest. In the shock of meeting a few lose their seats, but sturdily climb back and rejoin their comrades, who after separating ride together again in circles—then again “expose their backs in flight”—and once more return to attack: “forming that picture of war, that portrayal of actual battle” between the Greeks and the Trojans, in all its precise traditional setting, with minute attention to details, as it has come down in the immortal *Æneid*.

At the end of the mimic battle, which was waged in the *Circus primus*, the large area at the west end of the course directly in front of the imperial box, again in formation the riders pass in review before the Emperor, then “in peaceful procession” proudly sweep around the course. On the left of the front line in Atys’ troop, a handsome, laughing boy with blue eyes and reddish hair waved gaily at a rigid, white-faced figure behind the Vestals. “’Tis Domitius,” said Octavia, smiling kindly and waving a scarf, as the youthful rider passed: “And see! There is Britannicus!” pointing to a chubby figure hanging stoutly to the neck of a pony in the last rank, and clapping her hands: while her companions jumped to their feet and waved wildly as they shouted, “*Salve, Britannicus—nobilis puer*” (Hail to the noble youth, Britannicus!)

The cry was taken up in the neighboring boxes, but before it was well under way a stentorian voice rang out from the benches of the soldiers up above: “Hail Germanicus—hail to the young Domitius and the noble Agrippina!” and, as if by preconcerted signal from all

parts of the Circus, there came an answering roar, "Germanicus, Germanicus—all hail to the son of Germanicus!"

The boy had been discreetly coached, and although for a moment abashed, quickly regained composure and gleefully brandished his spear, at which the cheering masses went wild. Down the north side, across the *circus inferior* at the lower end, and back along the south course the march proceeded, the spectators cheering more and more lustily—toward the end the shouts for Germanicus and Agrippina not infrequently punctuated with execrations for the Augusta.

If the Emperor heard the latter, he heeded not—the people enjoying full license during the spectacles. Moreover, shrewdly inspired by his Treasurer, Claudius was not ill-pleased that the myth upon which he had ridden to power still was potent, both with soldiers and populace. It might have been otherwise if Messalina had been present. But fortunately for Domitius and his mother, the Augusta was elsewhere engaged in her own plans for power and self-indulgence; and at a rustle of the curtains behind, Agrippina, who during all the tumult and applause had been quietly conversing with the Vestals—outwardly composed and unconcerned, but on fire within—turned to exchange triumphant glances with the dark-faced Pallas, her heart throbbing at this victorious turning of the first goal in her own supreme contest. And while for her also the industrious three were spinning and determining—and waiting—under the driving passion of her inflexible determination, even if forewarned, she would have recked not that in the experience of the unfortunate "Crow" at least in part was symbolized her own unhappy fate.

As the youthful riders were disappearing down the great covered way below the Editor's box, from a balcony directly above a huge chorus broke out in the *Car-men Sæculare* with which the sweetest of Latin singers immortalized the *Ludi* of Augustus:

*Certus, undenos deciens per annos
orbis ut cantus referatque ludos
ter die claro totiensque grata
nocte frequentis.*

And as the noble lines and sonorous measure fell on the ears of the departing multitude, even the most thoughtless among them, if not utterly abased, must have been thrilled by that profound confidence in the endurance of the Eternal City, which found expression in the poet's majestic words,

So when the cycle, set of old
Swings through its hundred years and ten
Such crowds as these, such games shall hold
Three days and yet three nights again!

Through a cryptoporticus leading to a postern gate at the foot of a winding staircase, Octavia's little party gained an embowered path which climbed the south slope of the Palatine. Pythias and her lover, walking slowly, gradually fell behind—the former talking rapidly and with hectic animation—the other answering little, except with his eyes, which embarrassed her more than any spoken words. It was a novel experience for the young girl, perhaps for the first time in her life in danger of losing her poise.

As they approached the last bend in the path, beyond which the others discreetly had hastened, Junius stopped and looked inquiringly at his companion. For an instant she stood trembling; then, her face suffused with blushes, laying her hand upon his arm she gazed searchingly into his eyes—and with something like a sob yielded to his eager embrace, while he cried passionately, “O *amata*, my beautiful one, how I love thee!”

“’Tis thou alone—always and forever, Junius,” she whispered: “Oh, be good to me, my Caius!”

Kissing her again and again, he swore by all the gods that his life was hers, that never would his devotion fail, that she was his lovely goddess. Her own passion rose to meet him, until ashamed she hid her face and lay panting on his breast: then tearing herself away cried breathlessly, in mock reproach:

“Thou hast made me pay with usury—which was not in the wager; begone, ungenerous one!” and with an adorable smile, turning quickly, she fled up the path and disappeared around the bend.

IN THE SHADOW OF A TRAGEDY

ON a sunny morning in October an immense crowd had assembled in the Forum to await the celebration of a funeral to which the populace had been invited by a herald passing through the streets about the fourth hour, crying in a loud voice:

"A Quirite is dead; come all who have leisure to join in the *funus*."

The deceased was of an old patrician family, and although it was not to be a *funus indictivum*—with public games as a part of the celebration—the *pompa*, or funeral procession, alone promised abundant entertainment to the idle and curious, who in all ages and under all forms of civilization are contented if they but see something going on.

"Hola! Gallus," shouted a keen-faced individual wearing a green *lacerna*, leaning over a retaining wall a little above the arch of Tiberius, to a man of powerful build who was edging his way through the crowd below; "Come up here where thou canst both see and enjoy good companionship!"

"Ha, Callinus, is it thou indeed?" cried the other in surprise; "assuredly will I join thee—out of my path there," and ruthlessly he forced his way through the angrily protesting crowd, swept aside by his mighty arms as if children—until someone shouted, "'Tis Gallus, the *lanista*!" whereat the curses changed to cheers, and all fell back willingly.

"See what it means to be a provider of carrion for these

vultures," said the trainer of gladiators contemptuously, as hot and perspiring he gained the stand.

"'Tis more effective than the whips of the lictors," smilingly rejoined the other. "But why art thou here in the hot glare instead of at the quarters with thy fighters—or at thy bottle in the wineshop?"

"For the same reason thyself hath come: the young Servius was my patron, whose gold hath filled my chest—I could not less than pay this semblance of respect to his *manes*. My men have a holiday—and the wineshop will come later."

"Thy success never outruns thy good sense," answered Callinus, who was purveyor of the "Greens." "As for me, Servius never forgave the disastrous affair with that villainous 'Crow': acting on my advice he had wagered a fortune on Glaucus, and in truth the Jews fleeced him badly in arranging to meet his losses. But see! they are coming."

Winding down the Carinæ the procession, punctiliously arranged by the professional *designator*, had entered the Forum, a body of lictors under an *apparitor*, clearing the way and maintaining order. In front walked the *tibicinæ*, female flute-players, followed by a group of women-mourners wailing a panegyric for the dead. Next came a band of *mimi*, some quoting passages from the poets and tragedians deemed especially applicable, to which their leader, carefully chosen in respect of height, carriage and general appearance to simulate the deceased, inclined an attentive ear; the others dancing, posturing, jesting and merrymaking generally.

Next appeared the *imagines majorum*, ancestral impersonators, wearing waxen masks and studiously garbed to represent the various ancestors and collateral relatives of the departed, walking directly in front of the *lectus*, an elevated funeral couch of ivory, spread with gold-embroidered coverlets, upon which rested the corpse: borne by slaves whose manumission had been provided in the will.

Immediately behind came the relatives and servants—those among the latter whose freedom had been similarly provided, or would be awarded by the heirs of the deceased, wearing hats—followed by a long line of friends. Except the ancestral impersonators, all in the funeral party proper were dressed in black.

In front of the rostra the *lectus* was set down and mounting the tribune one of the near relatives pronounced the *laudatio funebris*. As he extolled the genius, the nobility, the public services—especially the virtue of the departed (who had been one of the most depraved among the dissolute companions of Messalina and the Consul Vitellius) even among the relatives and friends not a few openly smiled and nudged each other, while many of the spectators laughed outright.

“By Castor,” sarcastically observed Gallus to his friend, “Montanus should have embellished his oration with the tale of the little Greek girl whom his virtuous nephew choked to death and cast into Tiber last May because during the *Bona Dea* she refused to run naked into the Atrium of the Vestals. *Pah!* Let us to old Bulla’s and gossip over a bowl of the Falernian of which ever thou art bragging—I have not met thee in a *saeculum*,” and they hurried away in advance of the crowd which lingered, until at the close of the address the procession departed for the burial place outside the gates, where amidst the loud laments of the hired *præficæ* the body would be consumed and the ashes, sprinkled with wine, laid away in the family tomb.

Passing through the main room of the *popina*, the friends were ushered into a small alcove, screened by a leather curtain, Felix swelling with pride at a visit from such well-known and important personages.

“’Tis a holiday with us, *Popa*,” said Callinus lightly, as he cast aside his outer garment and threw himself upon a bench. “See that we have thy rarest and oldest vintage, and bring the amphora before straining, that we may

ourselves read the name and the consul. But stay. Gallus, I am minded to throw with thee for the privilege of paying—'twill add to the zest, and besides I would learn if the gods are turning my way: of late I have been unlucky. What sayest—Ay? Then Felix fetch the *tessera*, and without fear: be sure no aedile will dare spy on Gallus!"

"No longer is there cause for fear," Bulla replied. "The interdiction hath been removed, as also that which forbade sale in the *popinæ* either of food or hot water to drink. Moreover, have I been told by the librarian Scorpis, Claudius himself hath writ a book on the harmless pleasures of gaming," smiling complacently as he departed for the dice.

"'Tis wonder the Augusta did not prompt a chapter on some other harmless pleasures which are common in *popinæ* whose proprietors are less scrupulous than old Bulla," said Gallus, yawning. "But thou must have been overlong absent in Greece, Callinus, to be so ignorant of what hath been going on at Rome."

"Yes, since June: good horses were hard to find," he answered, taking one of the boxwood cups which a grinning boy laid on the table. "What shall it be: a single throw and the highest number—a Venus to win?"

"As thou wilt," replied Gallus: and throwing his dice with a flourish he cried with boyish glee, "Three sixes and a five—hast lost, Callinus! No! by the Gods 'tis a Venus!" as the four cubes of his companion briskly rolled to a standstill and presented different numbers. "*Perpol!* couldst win like that in the circus soon mightst retire with a fortune to thy beloved Epirus. I have lost"—to Felix returning with the wine—"so make thy reckoning at a discount: the death of the free-spending Servius means a lean purse for the *lanista*."

"Pay what thou likest—or not at all," said Felix, slowly pouring the amber-colored fluid through a fine metal sieve into a handsome bronze bowl; then bowing cere-

moniously he withdrew, after directing attention to the writing on the earthenware amphora.

Brushing away the dust with a napkin, admiringly Gallus read aloud the label; "XLII ALB. VET. V. (*album vetus vinum*) L. Arr. a. u. 732" (Old white wine, No. 42; in the year of the City 732 [B. C. 22] Lucius Arruntius [Consul]); then draining his cup cried with gusto:

"Jupiter hear me! Callinus, hast made good thy boast! *Certe* the drink is of the best—it tingles to my very toes. By Bacchus, almost am I minded to sell out and open a wineshop; 'tis said the fellow is rich, the life is easy, and under a wise Cæsar, like Claudius, the calling even promises to become respectable"—laughing loudly as he ladled from the bowl.

"And if thou becomest respectable," said the Greek, as if musingly, but with a hint of sarcasm in his soft utterance, "when the thread is cut, instead of a ghostly journey by night to the pyre, in a covered bier born by menials, mayest have a *pompa*, with a panegyric from the tribune in the sun-lit Forum—as did the noble Servius."

The face of the *lanista* reddened as he rejoined harshly:

"I am a Roman citizen and will go down to Pluto sword in hand, not with a ticket of lies from the rostra. But no, old comrade"—reaching out a mighty fist as Callinus made a deprecatory gesture—"I know thou didst but joke; my blood stirred too quickly under the fire of this sharp wine, which provoketh a hasty pulse," and he gulped down another cup. "Come now, perchance thou knowest how the young knight died?"

"'Twas only last night I came with the horses—even as the gates were closing," answered Callinus. "I have heard nothing except that when this morning I said to Glaucus that with such and such a pair he would not have lost to the Cornix, he told me Servius had died of a fever, as was said."

Gallus rose and walked unsteadily out of the alcove, and as Bulla approached, said with a hiccough, "We sleep awhile, good *Popa*, and would not be disturbed" adding in a low whisper, "See to it that none approach within hearing."

Felix nodded intelligently, and after a seemingly careless glance about the room, the *lanista* turned back, pulling the curtains as he reentered the box. Then drawing close to Callinus he said in a guarded voice, "'Twas a fever at the beginning—but a dagger stroke at the end, which accounted for Servius. For his brother Traulus the Augusta had a passing fancy—lasting, so the gossips say, from sunset to sunrise. To do him justice 'tis believed Traulus obeyed with distaste: he is as much a man as his brother was caitiff. For this one who has gone she cared not at all—letting him tag along only because he might be useful as a friend of her lover Silius. With Mnester, Valens and some dance girls he got too drunk—not from nectar of the gods like that before us, which sharpens the wits without filching them, but with *vinum picatum*, that pitchy red wine from Campania, which goes to the head—and stays there. So the fool babbled: a spy—some say Mnester himself—took it to Messalina, and Servius went as swiftly as did the freedman Polybius. 'Twas covered up—but I have it straight from Valens, the physician, who is in my debt."

"Well, I can understand," said Callinus carelessly; "but why all this mystery and secrecy about a mere dagger thrust which is but a commonplace in Rome: and of what did he babble—or is that the crux?"

"Thou hast said," Gallus whispered impressively. "He boasted that Cæsar was preparing to sign a marriage contract between Messalina and Silius, and himself would dower the bride!"

Callinus started and cried in surprise, "He hath divorced her?"

“Not so loud—not so loud—art supposed to be asleep,” cautioned the *lanista* with a grin. “If our talk were overheard and carried to the palace it might end thy career as purveyor of chariots, and mine as would-be purveyor of wine; because whilst the Augusta careth nothing what Rome may say about what she *hath* done, in what is planning she hath too much at stake to tolerate open talk in advance.” Then drawing closer he whispered earnestly, “No one knows how it hath come about—much less how it will end. ’Tis said the freedmen themselves are puzzled and all greatly alarmed—except Pallas, who appears strangely indifferent: while the cowardly Consul seeks to play the *desultor*, riding both horses now, but expecting at the last to jump on the winner. The gods grant he falls between and is trampled!

“With the plot ready to burst, Rome is on edge. Some see a trap by the freedmen for Messalina, whom they both hate and fear. Others believe the old dotard really wants to marry Lollia, once the wife of ‘Little Boots,’ which would please Callistus, who first hath Cæsar’s ear. But most consider he acts from craven fear. Always he hath lived in the shadow of Caligula’s death and of late dire omens, prophecies and dreams have thrown him into a panic. The haruspices have interpreted that Messalina’s husband will die during the year: and so it is said Cæsar designs to further the marriage and then put Silius to death—himself thus escaping, albeit the prophecy is fulfilled.”

“And Messalina,” said Callinus reflectively: “never before hath she felt need of Pontifex or Flamen, or dowry, in such affairs—what then driveth *her*?”

“*Certe* ’tis a conspiracy to put Caius Silius in the palace,” the *lanista* breathed in the other’s ear. “Messalina foresees the end of Claudius: in truth only yesterday the Knight Novius was caught hovering near Cæsar with a dagger in the Temple of Mars. He was put to the torture but died without speaking, so that his accomplices

yet are free to push the undertaking; and the Empress remembers what befell Cæsonia when Caligula was killed.

“With Cæsar dead and none left of the Julian blood, except the absent Silanus, for whom she hath contempt, and Agrippina’s cub, who is too young, she believes Silius can win. He is Consul-elect, is handsome, rich and popular with the prætorians—his family having been loyal to Germanicus. But lest Silius, after gaining the sovereignty, should scorn his adulteress, she would marry him now, and after helping him win the prize, at his side as the Augusta share the power and glory.”

“And dost believe she is prepared to run the race to the end?” said the Greek, his keen eyes riveted upon the other’s face.

“She will run it until the last fish comes down,” the *lanista* declared with emphasis. “Before the sun hath thrice risen again from its bed—’twill be Claudius or Silius for whom Charon will be waiting at the ferry.”

His tale unfolded at last, in relief Gallus applied himself diligently to the fast-lowering bowl. For a while the Greek brooded in silence; then quickly rising, with set face and smoldering eyes, he said tersely:

“Hast told me many things, for which I thank thee Gallus, and in return tell thee this one: if what thou hast forecast comes about, be sure ’twill not be Claudius who will cross the Styx.

“I know the freedmen well; all are my fellow countrymen. Pallas is farsighted and will do nothing—he hath given hostages elsewhere and plays a waiting game. Callistus, who was trained under Caligula, is crafty, but slow to act, fearing a false move. ’Tis different with the Secretary, who hath both talent and determination. Always he will be found in the game when his own safety is at stake; and—as in this the Augusta will find at the end—Narcissus plays only with loaded dice. And yet, although I feel so sure, we must have a care. After all, thy cowardly Consul seems to have chosen the wiser

course: always it is best to bet on the winning horse—even if it is thy competitor's"—with a cold smile. "Come, let us away while the sun is shining."

Stopping to throw a handful of coins on the table, Gallus cried jovially to the pleased Bulla:

"And ever I attain the dignity of a well-appointed villa, thou alone shalt furnish my wine cellar, good Felix"; and passing into the street the friends separated, Callinus turning down in the direction of his stables in the Campus Martius, Gallus taking the street which traversed the Carinæ, bound for the shop of a fashionable *tonstrina* at the foot of the hill, to have his hair cut, his beard shorn and his nails cleaned in honor of his birthday.

THE STORM

FROM the roof of the Basilica Julia, in company with her nurse and pedagogue, Octavia also had witnessed the funeral celebration in the Forum. More than once she had seen the young knight, a gallant looking youth, on horseback in the riding-school, or at the game of ball in the gymnasium; and the vague but disquieting rumors about his death which, spreading like wildfire, at last crept through into the palace, had distressed her deeply.

The distance was too great to follow the impassioned utterances from the rostra, or catch the contemptuous remarks of the spectators. But the weird music of the flute-players and the wailing laments of the *præficæ* mournfully floated up to the platform, from whence the little party had a clear view of the procession as it finally moved along the street of the Tuscans, between the Basilica and the Temple of the Twin Gods, on its way to the Via Appia.

Leaning over the parapet, Octavia listened with rising emotion to the plaintive strains of the flutes, and the low dirges of the mourning-women. But as the actors swept by, in their noisy and vulgar buffooneries, she shrunk in aversion; and when her eyes fell upon the white-faced corpse, in all the mockery of its ghastly trappings, a coin to pay the Ferryman between its rigid lips, she clutched Eunice by the arm, crying passionately, "Oh! it is too dreadful—come quickly," and they hurried back to the bridge.

Early that morning, in response to an urgent message

from Pomponia, Pythias had started for the Villa; and when Octavia reached the palace she learned a slave had left word that the lady would not return until late afternoon. It was a relief, rather than a disappointment; she was unnerved, curiously depressed and wanted to be alone. As she had looked down upon the ghastly features of the young knight, a few days before in the fulness of life, now involuntarily and—as it was whispered—without warning embarked upon that dreaded journey to the unknown, the gruesome mockery of the funeral rites, which she had apprehended so abruptly, acted like the sudden tearing down of a curtain, behind which all sorts of horrible shapes and disjointed fancies were assembled. Still a child in years, in experience, thought and reflection unconsciously she had become a woman: and under the powerful emotions of the moment, some of the raw truth of existence flashed upon her. For the first time she realized the savage relentlessness of Fate. And it was with a curious sort of thrill—almost of eagerness that she had determined to unloose all the forebodings and anxious fears which hitherto she had bridled so resolutely, and deliberately investigate and consider them.

In the secluded little garden behind the gymnasium the neglected daughter of an Emperor sat in brooding introspection. On the grass nearby lay one of the great, raw-boned dogs, its head flattened upon the outstretched forepaws, its tawny, unblinking eyes riveted upon her face. There was a depth of brute adoration in the steadfast stare and marble posture: but to the forlorn young girl in the rising bitterness of her reflections it was as if she were standing alone in the darkness and gloom of some trackless desolation, without guide, solace or hope.

Ever since that day in the Circus when she had been so shocked by the curses and vilification openly heaped upon her mother, the vague apprehensions previously aroused had become definite and fixed. But in that splendid self-abnegation which is the especial attribute of noblest

womanhood, she had suffered in silence—withholding her distress and sorrow even from Pythias and Pomponia. To be sure the quick-witted daughter of Fabius had not been misled; but realizing the futility of attempted comfort, she could only devote herself to still greater vigilance against the danger of evil gossip filtering through.

That which Octavia already knew had bitten deep into her soul. Gradually she had become aware that at heart her father and mother cared nothing for each other—and little, if indeed anything, for their children; that with the Emperor, Calpurnia and others of her kind had usurped the place of the Augusta—who herself long since had abandoned all pretense of conjugal duties and become the sport of the most shocking stories. And now, with the death of Montanus, had come the rumor of an impending terrible climax, in the looming shadow of which she visioned herself and Britannicus enfolded in the mantle of everlasting shame and despair. The gods had turned their faces—she was alone—alone: not yet accorded even that last dubious privilege enjoyed by the dead Servius, of blotting out all recollection by the plunge into Lethe.

As the tears fell from her eyes, something cold pressed against the limp hand resting upon the marble bench, and in a rush of weakness she dropped upon the grass and buried her face in the shaggy hair of the huge beast which whimpered and writhed in delight at such unwonted attention from one who rarely went beyond a kindly word or light caress. “O Pollux,” she cried, “if only I had thy courage and fearlessness—that I may not prove craven, but bravely face what comes—as thou wouldst die fighting against whatsoever odds!”

In the eagerness of his response the dog barked loudly, which brought an answering chorus from the other side of the gymnasium; and in a moment his companion dashed through the opening, closely followed by the shouting Dio, who recoiled in surprise when he saw Octavia caressing the fawning dogs.

Smiling faintly she relieved his embarrassment by saying, "The gods have sent thee, Dio: run quickly to the courtyard and bid the tribune come to me at once: go! Pollux—go!" And dogs and keeper disappeared in a wild rush.

Measurably regaining her composure before Marcus arrived, after greeting him in her usual kindly manner, Octavia enquired, "Why didst not accompany the lady Pythias to the villa?"

"I wanted to do so, but she bade me stay within thy call," he answered.

"And dost take thy orders from her, or from me?" she asked, with pretended severity.

"From thee, of course," the embarrassed tribune answered reddening, "but—but when thou are not present to bolster me 'tis hard to withstand the little lady, when she sets her will."

"And perchance thou believest it will be the same with Junius—even after the Pontifex hath joined them?" she said jestingly.

"Even more so," replied the tribune with grave emphasis; at which Octavia laughed outright, a glint of color lighting her pale cheeks.

"Always hast ready wit to wait on thy excuse, Marcus, but whether I shall acquit thee this time depends. I would see my father; knowest if he is at the palace?"

"Cæsar hath gone to Ostia to inspect the new harbor, and is not expected to return in three days."

"And my mother?" said Octavia carelessly. "Why did she not go with Cæsar?"

"The Augusta was indisposed, I believe," the tribune answered hesitatingly.

"My mother is ill? Come, I will go to her," cried Octavia, with a quick movement toward the path.

"But—the Augusta hath left the palace," stammered Marcus in confusion.

"How can that be if she is ill? And where hath she

gone—or, if thou knowest not, where thinkest thou I may find her?”

“I know not: nor is it meet for me to busy myself with the Augusta’s affairs,” he fenced.

Octavia regarded him thoughtfully; then, after stooping to caress Pollux, she stood erect and looking straight into the eyes of Marcus asked sharply, “What was the sickness from which Montanus died?”

The tribune was startled, but answered steadily enough, “’Twas a fever from which he suffered, noble lady.”

“Some say there was foul play,” calmly rejoined Octavia, her eyes still intent upon him.

“I had not heard,” he stammered, in a low voice.

“It is convenient not to have heard when one doth not wish to tell the truth,” she observed, in a tone she tried to make contemptuous.

Marcus started violently, his face crimsoned and the veins in his neck swelled and throbbed; but with a great effort he controlled himself and compressing his lips remained silent.

“One question more and thou mayest leave the rack: what is the Augusta now planning, for which all Rome is on tiptoe and feverishly waiting?”

“Nay,” he answered sternly, with set jaws and paling face, “I am but the tribune of the palace guard and not in the confidence of the Augusta—which, indeed, I would not betray if it were otherwise. I am neither an informer nor a tattler of idle gossip,” drawing himself up proudly.

“Nor a teller of lies,” said Octavia pensively, looking down at the great head which pressed against her, and as Marcus winced perceptibly she added:

“’Tis pity thy ‘little lady’ is not here to succor thee”: at which he blurted out, “In truth I would it were so,” wiping the sweat from his brow.

“Plainly thou fearest her more than thy mistress,” she said caustically. “Then thou wilt tell me nothing?”

“I have nothing to tell,” he answered with finality.

"Thou knowest what would happen if I complained of thee to Cæsar, or to the Augusta—ah!" as the truth flashed upon her, "my mother herself hath commanded!" and she caught at her breast, swaying dizzily against the marble seat.

The tribune shook his head despairingly, regarding her with a glance in which fathomless pity, sympathy and devotion were blended with rage at his utter impotence, and muttered confusedly, "I am accursed of the gods, Augusta."

Momentarily recalled from her own misery by the young man's manifest distress, with the old winsome kindness she said with a pitiful attempt to smile, "I am not the Augusta, Marcus—only Octavia, *puella parva paupera*—a poor little girl. 'Tis plain thou art confused and not mentally alert, and thus to be excused for any contradiction, or lack of memory or other seeming failure in thy loyal service to Cæsar's unhappy daughter. Go now to Eunice and bid her send Eos to me"; and with a show of tranquillity, she turned aside, as the tribune saluted and marched stiffly down the path.

At the sound of a halting footstep behind the hedge, the great dog, which had returned with the tribune, rose cautiously and with ears erect and quivering nostrils stared at the opening between the lions; and when the figure of the limping slave girl appeared he growled angrily, the hair along his spine bristling.

"Be quiet—lie down, Pollux!" cried Octavia, stamping her foot, at which he slowly assumed a crouching position on the grass, still voicing low menaces, as he eyed the approaching figure with open hostility.

"Eos," said her mistress, in a tone never before used by her to the unfortunate cripple, "yesterday I caught a few words between thee and one of the Augusta's *lecticarii*: tell me all that was said."

"I dare not," said the trembling girl: "I would be beaten, or worse."

"Nay," said Octavia soothingly, "thou knowest by the Augusta's own orders I alone may punish thee. But listen carefully; if now when I command thee to speak thou dost refuse, or answer falsely, thou shalt indeed be punished, and with severity."

"Well then, have it—and thou wilt," the girl flashed defiantly. "And at worst it will anger that spiteful Pythias, whom I hate, and who hath threatened the torture if ever I tell thee anything. The man told me Cæsar hath signed the marriage contract between the Lord Silius and the Augusta, that she will wed him to-morrow, and that angered by the blabbing of these things by the Knight Servius, she sent him to Hades. And the people say 'tis only a question of hours whether he shall be followed across Acheron by Cæsar, or by the Augusta—if not by both"; then, aghast at her own temerity, forgetful of all respect and duty, with a passionate gesture she turned and fled down the slope.

As she disappeared through the gateway another figure came running up the path, and throwing her arms about the agonized Octavia Pythias cried breathlessly:

"What is it, *cara*—what hath that little wretch said to thee?"

"She hath told me everything," sobbed Octavia, "and my heart is breaking."

White with anger, Pythias jumped to her feet and with eyes blazing shouted at the cringing dog, "Why didst not tear her to pieces—did I not command thee to watch? I will have her beaten to a jelly and cast out of the palace"; and in her blind rage actually started down the path—but as instantly returned and bursting into a storm of tears, cast herself despairingly upon the bench.

After a long silence Octavia lifted her head and said wearily, "The gods willed it, and truly it is best I should be in the dark no longer. Already I had come close to the truth and when Marcus refused to speak, I forced it from Eos under threat of punishment. She is not to blame—

and indeed Pollux would have harmed her, had I not restrained him."

"Good dog—I absolve thee," said Pythias, and the brute whined and licked the hand which touched him. "But she is a wretch and hath acted for malice rather than fear. I myself was hastening to break it to thee, as at last the Lady Pomponia counseled. At her entreaty, the General had gone to Caius Silius. When he returned, frozen with rage so that he would not see me, she came weeping and said there was no hope, that only the mercy of that mysterious Christus could avert the—that which thou knowest, of which the General foresees a tragic ending. She bade me say that since no longer art thou a child, it is meet thou shouldst learn to suffer, as is the lot of all women; but that thou must be very brave, remembering thy high station, and that the people love and honor thee; and that in thy behalf she will pray earnestly to her own secret god, who is all-powerful and hath great mercy."

"If indeed there be such a god, he ruleth elsewhere than in Rome," said Octavia sadly, her head again falling on the other's shoulder.

Pythias kissed her tenderly: "Let us go, *cara*, those heavy clouds on Aventinus presage a storm—and there sounds the thunder," as a long and ominous peal came rolling up from the direction of the sea.

A watchful figure was standing at attention as they passed through the hedge. Pythias gave him an appealing glance, but neither ventured to speak, and as they hurried on through the gathering gloom the tribune with shoulders squared aggressively, alongside the dog with drooping head and the dejected air of a wrong-doer, silently followed them to the palace.

The storm was close at hand when they attained the vestibule. First a low moaning of the oncoming wind steadily increasing in volume and force until it was roaring and raging with demoniac violence. Then the earth

began to tremble under the tremendous detonations of thunder, at last falling in an almost continuous peal; while the stygian blackness of the low-hung clouds momentarily gave way to the blinding glare of the lightning which blazed and darted its forked tongues in every direction. In the more exposed places not a few bolts found their mark, huge blocks of riven stone toppling down from the pediments and surmounting ornaments of the temples and other great structures on the hilltops, followed now and then by ascending smoke and crackling flame, the air acrid with its surcharge of the decomposed electric fluid. One bolt fell in the Comitium, shearing a huge limb from the tree Ruminalis, in the shade of which, eight hundred years before, Romulus and Remus had been nourished by the she-wolf—regarded as a most dreadful portent, when discovered on the following day. Then came the rain in sheets, the rushing torrents from the hills speedily converting into shallow lakes the lowlands of the Forum, the Valabrum and Campus Martius.

The downpour soon yielded to another furious onslaught of wind which shrieked and tore and buffeted its way along the valleys and over the hills the greater part of an hour, during which the city cowered in impenetrable darkness, stabbed intermittently by flaming arrows from the north and still shuddering under the reverberations of the thunder, in sullen attendance upon the furious messengers from the brassbound rock of Æolus, reluctant to depart.

For Octavia and Pythias, deeply imbued with the superstitions of the time, in the wild tumult of the raging elements fresh terrors were born. Breaking so suddenly and at the very fullness of the October moon, the storm in itself was an omen of evil, while the intensity of the thunder and lightning had its special message of disaster for all who cared to forecast, in advance of its true interpretation by the *haruspices*. That the wild fury of the tempest presaged the anger of the gods was the natural

sequence of the dark thoughts and forebodings which already enthralled them: so that in all the storm-swept city perhaps there were none to whom the portents appeared more terrible than to the suffering young girls.

In the darkness of Octavia's little *cubiculum*, its casement closed against the gale and driving rain, locked in each other's arms, they awaited in dull and silent misery the passing of the storm. Toward the end of the first watch the tumult died away, and the rain having ceased Pythias opened the casement and rested her throbbing head upon the sill. Scourged by Zephyrus, already the clouds were scurrying away, the air rippled cool and refreshing, and at last, in all her matchless splendor, the goddess of night majestically rose from her couch and entered upon her radiant journey through the heavens.

A moonbeam fell caressingly upon the pale, drawn features of Octavia, reclining among the pillows on a couch Pythias had drawn near the window: and as her tears dropped upon the stone the daughter of Fabius breathed an earnest prayer to Juno Moneta, the goddess of heaven, the giver of good counsel, the protector of women, that the curses of the aroused and avenging Furies might be averted from the fair and innocent daughter of the Cæsars.

THE MARRIAGE OF CAIUS SILIUS

THE morning broke gloriously after the storm. Cleansed of its impurities and impalpable dust, the atmosphere was like crystal; the crisp October air, winnowed by the winds, had the tang of rare old wine, while the transcendent blue of the wondrous Latin skies disclosed its richest coloring under the refracting magic of the far-flung golden rays projected in lavish splendor from the early-rising sun.

At the house of Caius Silius in the fashionable Carinæ the members of the *familia* were astir early. Like most dwellers in the great city, terrified by the violence of the storm—its portents more dreaded than the overseer's scourge—they had slept little and badly; and at the first grey hint of awakening dawn, in glad relief and with noisy eagerness, they swarmed from their cells and chambers in the basement and in the upper story of the mansion, which, as they had been warned the night before, must be thoroughly cleaned and painstakingly put in order, adorned and provisioned for the coming festivity.

Upon the appearance of the overseer, a freedman of imperious mien, accompanied by his assistant, the work proceeded with feverish energy, each group of toilers under supervision of its special superintendent. The pavements outside and the mosaic floors within were scrubbed and scoured, the windows made spotlessly transparent, the polished marble pillars carefully rubbed with coarse woolen cloths, the walls and ceilings cleansed of their smoke stains, the furniture, statues and ornaments scrupu-

lously dusted, the silver and bronzes burnished and rubbed, the trophies and ancestral images decked with fresh garlands, the halls and corridors brightened and embellished by an effective grouping of exquisite flowers, rare and beautiful plants and graceful flowering shrubs.

The activity was especially pronounced in the kitchens, under the exacting direction of the culinary overseer, assisted by a host of pastry-cooks, scullions, market men, wood-carriers and other subordinates, and in the dining rooms, where a numerous attendance of dressers, carvers, servers, cup-bearers and youths who saw to the lighting were drilled by and carried out the orders of the *tricliniarcha*, in charge of the general arrangements for an elaborate wedding feast.

The master of the house had spent the night elsewhere—no doubt detained by the inclement weather, as Cleon, the sprightly *cubicularius*, slyly observed to a giggling chambermaid. Free from the restraint of his presence and encouraged by a display of good-natured tolerance on the part of the major-domo and his assistant, the little army of workers was in high spirits, and gossip flowed freely with jokes flying back and forth.

“Hola, Gyges,” cried a slave who was scrubbing the mosaic floor of the entrance, to the *ostiarius*, chained in his *cella* at one side, “the Furies must have been after thee last night; it were hard to tell thy howlings from those of the dog,” mischievously flirting some water at the latter, lying in his corner with eyes closed.

The brute awoke with an angry growl, as the bearded janitor answered vengefully, “Since thou canst not tell a dog’s voice from a man’s, let the dog answer for me—at him, Sirius!” And the snarling beast leaped the length of his chain, missing by inches the affrighted joker, who jumping backwards, tripped over a pail and rolled down the steps, amidst a roar of laughter from his fellows.

Regaining his feet, the discomfited man wildly brandished his mop-stick, shrieking at the complacent Gyges,

"Thou misshapen fool, I'll crack thy ugly head and of thy rotten carcass make a meal for the dog which will poison him"; but on the instant a stinging blow fell across his shoulders and turning in a panic he dropped to his knees before the frowning *vicarius*.

There was a moment of tense silence: then threatening with his rod the overseer commanded sternly, "Get to thy cell quickly or thyself shall become food for the dog—unchain him, Gyges!" with a wink for the grinning janitor, at whose move of pretended compliance the terrified slave fled incontinently, attended by a fresh burst of uproarious laughter from the delighted onlookers.

"Call him back," said the *vicarius*, smiling grimly, to a gaping youth holding a bucket, who dropped his burden and disappeared like a flash, speedily returning with the trembling Geta, to whom the overseer said severely, "Wouldst provoke the gods by spilling blood on thy master's threshold the day he is to cross it with his bride? Quick, now; make amends to Gyges for thy senseless anger, before Pyrrhus comes to put thee on bread and water, with the iron collar—or worse."

Geta's fright, as undoubted as ordinarily it would have been justified, had not bereft him of either shrewdness or sense of humor. Approaching the grizzled janitor with a display of humility, he said contritely:

"I crave thy pardon, Gyges: all know thy courage and fearlessness. The thunder and lightning had bewildered me—'twas my own howling that was heard. Shalt have my share of the wine that comes to the kitchen after the feast—and Sirius the biggest bone I can beg from the cook"; and at a grunt from the mollified janitor, he resumed his labors with an air of mingled penitence and complacency.

Turning to hide his amusement, the *vicarius* saw a band of slaves in the palace livery toiling up the street, burdened with pieces of furniture, silverware, rare porcelains, wearing apparel and other impedimenta—among them

Claudius' own *cubicularius* carrying a huge, gilded cage, covered with purple gauze: the convoy in charge of the shame-faced Marcus with two of the palace guards.

A loud laugh rang out from behind, as the steward came hurrying through the *ostium*. Halting beside his assistant, with legs spread wide and hands on hips, he cried jocosely:

"Another load from the Palatine, Philemon—and the morning is yet young! Jupiter hear me, and the wedding should be deferred a few more days, truly I know not which would be the more disgruntled—Cæsar at finding an empty palace on his return, or the Lord Caius at lack of room to house all these treasures! What hast in the cage, Xanthippus?"

With a smirk the freedman withdrew the covering and disclosed the famous black starling clinging to the bars, at which it pecked for a moment, and then cried briskly, "Caius, Caius, Caius—I want to get out—I want to get out!"

The *vicarius* stared in wonder, while the valet and steward exchanged meaning glances: then, after directing bestowal of the goods, Pyrrhus led his assistant out of hearing and gave way to unrestrained laughter.

"Truly the bird is wise," he said wiping his eyes, "and no wonder 'tis beloved by the Augusta more than anything in Rome—except herself. Hitherto always it hath appealed to Cæsar in its demand for freedom—often have I heard it: now, when it comes to dwell in the Carinæ, it cries the name of the Lord Caius!" Then lowering his voice he continued impressively:

"Last night, at Bulla's, I sat out the storm with Callinus—we were boys together in Epirus. He hath been well-informed and believeth Caius is doomed. With Cæsar at Ostia, at last the Augusta hath determined, and the game is about to be played out. To-night the marriage and the wedding feast, tomorrow the Bacchic festival in the gardens, and the next day—either thou wilt be with the

new Cæsar on the Palatine, or—thy master gone down the Styx—headed for the auction block; unless, indeed, shrewdly Caius can be persuaded to grant thy freedom as a sort of votive offering to Juno Pronuba,” with a chuckle. “I might whisper to Valens—who owes me a favor—when he gets drunk enough to suggest it to the Augusta. But it is surer to buy thy way free: how much hast thou in the *peculium*?”

“There is nothing,” said Philemon despondingly: “Caius took all my money yesterday when the Augusta’s myrrhine vase was broken, which he declared was my fault.”

“Had Messalina herself been here, thou wouldst not have gotten off so easily,” said Pyrrhus grimly. “But come, I will lend the money to thee—to whom my own fattening purse ever hath been much beholden. Go carefully then, until I give the word. As for me, to-morrow ends my service—Caius hath agreed. With what I shall amass from all this expenditure I may make the final payment to old Manlius, and take possession of my fruit shop on the Velia. May the gods go with us both”—and he hurried back to the house.

His mission accomplished by the safe delivery of the feathered prisoner, Marcus rapidly retraced his way through the Carinæ to the Via Triumphalis, and thence towards the Forum. The streets were thronged with persons of all sorts and conditions, many of whom had been abroad since break of day, inspecting the damage done by the storm and excitedly discussing its portents. With few exceptions, all had reacted to the peaceful calm and radiant beauty of the morning, and in the warmth of the mellow sunshine and under the relief occasioned by the mere commonplace of daylight and companionship, the last vestiges of fear excited by the night’s terrors had been dissipated.

The usually frank and good-natured countenance of the tribune was clouded, and as he pushed his way through

the motley multitude he muttered irritably, "Fine business for a soldier and Roman Knight—parading the city as guard to a silly bird. By Jupiter, but for the absence of Lucius and Junius and the plight of those unhappy girls, I would beg Plautius to intercede with Cæsar for my transfer to the legions; death in the German forest would be preferable to this shameful dallying in the service of a shameless woman."

At the *Summa Sacra Via* his attention was called by the guards to an enormous crowd massed at the upper end of the Forum in the neighborhood of the Curia, where the fig tree of the Twin Brothers had been riven by the lightning; but disdaining a second glance, without checking his rapid stride, he turned to the left and climbed the Vicus Apollinus, to make his report at the palace.

"The Augusta commands thy presence, noble tribune," said the *atriensis* respectfully; and with a deepening frown Marcus followed to the apartments of the Empress.

Robed in an amethyst-colored *tunica interior*, without sleeves, and surrounded by her hand-maidens, Messalina was reclining upon a cushioned *cathedra*, her head resting listlessly against the sloping back. Some of the girls were busily plying their needles and otherwise preparing the elaborate wedding garments; one on her knees was trying on the saffron-colored bridal shoes; others were deftly dressing the golden hair, which loosened from its braids, clustered in confusion about her neck and shoulders, dividing it into the required six locks, three on each side, by means of the symbolical *hasta cælibaris*, a spear-shaped comb; while at either hand adepts in the special art of beautifying the hands and polishing the finger nails were assiduously engaged.

The Empress was very pale, there were dark shadows under her eyes, her face looked haggard and careworn, its prevailing expression one of anxiety. The departure of the Emperor on a three days' absence having opened the way, Silius had found no difficulty in convincing her that

now if ever the step must be taken. While she had not the slightest conception of shame in what was projected—even if it had been otherwise she had given too many hostages to her baser nature to hesitate in risking one more—as the hour approached she began to realize that the present commitment was a crucial one. Of the imbecile Emperor she had no fear: always she might blind him to the most obvious of her wrong-doing. It was the shrewd and resourceful freedmen who constituted the one great menace and made the issue doubtful; and she knew they were alert and active. In truth, the dreadful storm had affected her nerves. And then, as every one knew, the day—the first after the Ides—for any other than the month of June was inauspicious for a wedding.

But she had waded in too far, and the current had become too swift to regain the shore: the crossing must be accomplished, or as Vitellius, who now was Censor, had whispered, she would be lost in mid-stream. Silius was strong, courageous, high-spirited and popular; Claudius a worn-out, timid fool, and she herself sufficiently endowed with beauty, birth and energy to emulate the first Augusta, who through a second marriage, in which her then existing husband likewise had signed the dowry, attained her commanding success and the highest glory. And under the reactionary surge of her ardent temperament and native vanity, all the old recklessness and self-assurance returned: so that when Marcus was announced she had entirely regained her proud self-mastery, and the otherwise beautiful face wore its customary expression of hard, imperious determination.

Releasing herself from the ministration of the attendants, she bent her eyes steadfastly upon the grave face of the tribune. She knew his worth, and perhaps came as near cherishing a genuine respect for his upright character as it was possible for her debased nature to accredit anyone.

“I have word from the Lady Pomponia, who is indis-

posed, begging that my daughter and Pythias may come to the Villa," she said suavely, but with a meaning glance which left Marcus in no doubt that she herself had planned the visit. "They will set out within an hour. The General is careless of danger, his slaves for the most part old and decrepit; and since of late the Appia beyond the gates hath been over-infested with thieves and evil-doers, I would thou shouldst remain at the villa until their return on the third day—unless I shall send for thee earlier—give me the *tabellæ*," to the *cubicularia*, who speedily presented an exquisite double sheet of thin ivory, the borders raised to prevent friction of the waxed surfaces, upon which with a stylus she traced rapidly, then handed to the slave, who bound the leaves together with a silken pack thread, tied crosswise, covering the knot with purple wax, upon which with her finger ring the Augusta impressed a seal. "Present this to Aulus Plautius, to whom I have explained: and the gods go with thee—as is thy due." Then, impulsively, as the tribune turned to depart, imperiously waving the women aside, she summoned Marcus to return.

Try as he would, the tribune had not been able to banish the frown from his face, but his features softened as the Empress said hurriedly, in a low voice:

"Thou art a man of honor—and I have known no other," with a bitter inflection. "Old Seneca, with all his virtuous pretence, is an arrant hypocrite—the rest are liars, mendacious and corrupt. Thou art free from flattery and wilt speak the truth. Tell me—shall I win or lose?"

Looking straight into her eager eyes, without the quiver of a muscle, or the slightest tremor in his utterance, in a low, even tone the tribune answered gravely:

"Thou wilt lose, Augusta."

The blood rushed wildly to her face—then as instantaneously receded, leaving her blanched and deathlike as she fell back inertly among the pillows. A tremor passed

through her limbs and for an instant the tribune thought she would collapse. But as he was on the point of summoning the *cubicularia*, with a supreme effort she regained her control and lifting her head said colorlessly:

“ ’Tis as the gods will. But whatever comes, remember, Marcus, that never have I mistrusted thee—nor have I ever compromised thee, in this or other matter. In truth, ’tis as much for thy safety as for Octavia’s that I am sending thee both from the palace to-day. Already thou hast the confidence and good-will of all, and no one at the house of Aulus will be under suspicion. I know that to Octavia and Britannicus—and thy ‘little lady,’ ” with a faint smile—“thou wilt be a faithful friend. Go now,” and she extended her hand, which the tribune touched respectfully and, gravely saluting, withdrew.

In the long and varied history of the Palatine no such amazing occurrence ever had been chronicled as this marriage which was about to be celebrated, with all the legal requirements and religious rites, between a Roman Consul and the undivorced wife of a living Emperor. But it was for that very reason, and because they knew all Rome would stand aghast when the event became known, that the boon companions of Messalina, wearied of commonplace dissipation and excesses, found in this preposterous adventure an especial appeal to their jaded appetites and salacious imagination. Shortly before the twelfth hour they had assembled in the atrium of the palace, a dozen or more women and as many men—ten of the latter to act as witnesses to the signing of the marriage tablets, and of the former one who had been married only once to assist as *pronuba*, the matron-friend of the bride.

The magnificent atrium had been lavishly trimmed with green and was brilliantly illuminated. In the adjoining *lararium*, a room set apart for worship of the household gods—which had taken the place of the family hearth, the nucleus of the ancient atrium—already the augurs were

busily engaged in translating the omens from the entrails of a freshly killed sheep. The skin of the victim had been spread over two chairs standing side by side at the lower end of the main room, so placed that through the wide entrance to the chapel the altar was in full view.

As the sonorous voice of a slave intoned the hour, the curtains fell apart and to the sound of soft music from a hidden alcove the bridal party entered. The acting Pontifex Maximus—Cæsar's sacerdotal legate—in long flowing robes of white, came first, followed by the Flamen Dialis in his thick woolen *toga prætexta* girdled with twisted rope from which the sacrificial knife protruded, wearing his white conical hat with its woolen thread and olive branch at the top, and attended by one of his sons, who acted as a *Camillus*, bearing the votive offerings and other adjuncts of the ceremony. Then appeared the tall and manly figure of the handsome Consul, clad in his white robe bordered with purple and wearing white shoes tied with red strings, his dark curling locks crowned with a wreath of flowers and sacred herbs, in exultant attendance upon the radiant woman walking majestically at his side.

With glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, the Augusta swept by in all the pride of her vainglorious beauty and with rapturous elation over the distinctive simplicity of the wedding attire she had affected as that assigned by custom to an innocent girl who for the first time has laid aside the *toga prætexta* of maidenhood. She wore the white *tunica regilla*, woven in one piece in the old fashioned way at the upright loom, fastened with a woolen girdle tied in a Hercules knot, the ancient symbol of a stable marriage. Her feet were encased in yellow shoes. A flame-colored veil over a hair net of the same color—which was considered of good import—covered her head and in soft folds fell away behind and on either side of her face, surmounting a chaplet of flowers entwined with the sacred *verbenæ* which she herself had gathered.

Accompanied by the guests, the bridal party passed

into the chapel, pausing in front of the altar, from which the chief haruspex in measured symbolical form announced that the omens were propitious; and thereby assured of the divine approval, all returned to the atrium and the ceremony proceeded.

First the *tabulæ nuptiales* were signed by the contracting parties and the *dos*, or marriage portion, attested and sealed by the ten prescribed witnesses with the assistance of the augurs.

In the absence of her mother—Domitia Lepida and the Augusta having been estranged for years—the bride was given away by Tullia, wife of the senator Virgilianus, acting as *pronuba*. Joining the hands of Messalina and the Consul, she led them to the two chairs which had been prepared—the single sheepskin covering signifying that although the man and woman occupied different parts of the house, they were united by a common bond. Taking from a basket held by the Camillus a cake of spelt, the Pontifex Maximus made an offering to Jupiter, another cake was eaten jointly by the bridal pair, and the ritual ended with a prayer to Juno, the goddess of marriage, and to the deities of the country and its fruits, recited by the Flamen.

Dusk had fallen when the priests withdrew, and since all were both hungry and eager for the evening's meal, the noisy and effusive congratulations of the guests speedily gave way to the crowning and most picturesque feature of a Roman marriage in high life—the ceremonious fetching of the woman, by torchlight, to the home of her husband.

With simulated force—in supposed reminiscence of the Sabine marriage—the protesting bride was torn from the arms of the *pronuba* and carried by Caius to a sumptuous *lectica* waiting in the vestibule, where amidst shouts of merriment the procession quickly formed. In front were the torch bearers, leading a band of flute-players; then came the *lectica*—its curtains drawn back to the leather

head, to afford a clear view of the gleeful Messalina, reclining luxuriously upon the gorgeous purple coverings—borne by eight stalwart Cappadocian slaves in the palace livery of red, and attended by three patrician boys—the *pueri patrimi et matrimi*—one in advance bearing the lucky white-thorn torch, the others at either side of the litter, each holding a hand extended by the bride, the Camillus with his basket and a slave with the distaff and spindle walking behind, the *pronuba* with the other women following, and the male guests bringing up the rear. The part of the bridegroom was to scatter nuts—symbolizing the fruitfulness of marriage—among the crowd which was bound to assemble outside the palace enclosure.

Turning into the Vicus Apollinus, the procession wound its way down the hill, preceded by the *anteambulones* crying, “Give way to the Lord Caius and his bride!” With music of the flutes, gay laughter, singing of hymeneal songs and tumultuous cheering by the attendant rabble, the rollicking march proceeded over the ridge of the Velia, along the Triumphalis to its junction with the Via Carinæ, and thence up the hill, past the ancient temple of Tellus, the houses of Pompey, Marc Antony, and the father of Cicero, to the resplendent home of Silius near the Porticus of Livia. As the litter turned into the vestibule Messalina dropped into the street as an offering to the Lares Compitales (the deities of the nearest crossways) one of the three coins which she carried. Alighting in front of the entrance, with oil and wool from the basket of the Camillus she bound and anointed the door posts, to signify health and plenty: then amidst the cheers and laughter of the surging guests she was lifted in the arms of Caius and carried across the threshold to avoid the bad omen which her possible stumbling would occasion.

With all the doors and curtains thrown back, the three magnificent courts in all the witchery of their marble columns, their gleaming walls, their splashing fountains and charming decorations, illumined by scores of lamps hang-

ing from the branches of candelabra and suspended by chains from the ceilings and roofs, constituted an exquisite setting for the last tableau in the performance. Nor had the *pronuba* forgotten to prepare the symbolical *lectus genialis*, or marriage bed, which with its gorgeous coverings of purple had been correctly placed at the lower end of the atrium, directly opposite the opening through which the guests entered.

At the end of the farther court Caius appeared with a flaming torch in one hand, in the other a basin of water. Traversing in turn the peristyle and the middle court, gravely he extended the symbols to Messalina, waiting in the atrium near the lectus, to signify he admitted her to the family hearth and to share in the family lustral rites. She responded by saluting her husband with the ancient formula, "*Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia,*" at the same time presenting her two remaining coins—one as a symbol of the dower, the other as an offering for the *Lares familiares*, the deities of her new home; to which Caius replied in an equally measured symbolical form, in turn presenting her with the key of the house. Then the white-thorn torch was extinguished and with a merry shout cast by the Camillus into the midst of the eagerly waiting crowd, who scrambled madly for its possession as a lucky symbol—and the ceremony was at an end.

From the noisily contending mass the young wife of Plautius Lateranus, the Senator, finally tore herself free, gleefully waving the coveted prize—in the glow of success apparently oblivious that during the struggle she had been stripped both of *stola* and under-tunica nearly to the waist.

"By Jupiter, Plautius, the luck is coming thy way: mayhap it will be that thy rich old uncle is bound for Hades and at last thou wilt inherit the house across the way, which the prudish Pomponia hath scorned," cried the Knight Cotta, ruefully caressing an arm bruised in the *mêlée*.

"Not so," interrupted his friend Pompilius with a coarse sneer: "The omen is for Cæcilia alone: rather should Plautius now have a care lest, like Cæsar, he too shalt be called on to give up his wife," and every one laughed as Lateranus looked angrily at Saufellus Trogus, about whose persistent attentions to the gay and pleasure-loving Cæcilia the gossips had been busy.

"Now Aphrodite hear me," interjected the *pronuba*, rearranging her dishevelled attire, "'twas in hope of just that kind of luck myself fought for the torch-stick; willingly would I accept a divorce from Juncus wouldst some man of charm and wealth offer me such a celebration as Messalina hath enjoyed to-night"; and she looked meaningly at the handsome Montanus, who grew red with confusion under the burst of uproarious laughter, in which the husband of the matronly Tullia carelessly joined.

Pointing to the *tricliniarcha* hovering near the doorway in a fever of anxiety at this continued delay of his feast, already long overdue, Messalina good-naturedly interposed, hurrying her guests to their respective retiring rooms, where the shoes in which they had walked from the Palatine were replaced by sandals, delicate sleeveless *stolæ* ornamented at the neck with stripes of purple and gold, gifts from the bride, assumed by the women, and the togas of the men exchanged for light, loose-fitting *syntheses*, in a variety of brilliant colors, among which violet, green, scarlet and amethyst-purple predominated.

In the spacious banquet hall the five square tables, respectively flanked on each of three sides with a couch, the fourth side left open for the attendants, had been arranged along the arc of a semi-circle. The guests were assigned to their places by the host, who with the bride and four of their especially congenial companions occupied the central table. Caius reclined at the upper end of the *lectus medius*—that is, at the left of the middle couch as it faced the table—Messalina sitting on his right in the

place of honor at the lower end of the *lectus*. The matron Tullia sat next the groom at the lower end of the *lectus summus*, the couch at the right of the table, Saufellus Trogius reclining at her side, while the vivacious Cæcilia occupied the lower end of the so-called *lectus imus*, at the left of the table, Montanus reclining beside her at the end of the couch nearest the bride. Under this arrangement the man who while eating lay flat on his breast, or nearly so, faced his woman companion when occasionally he turned to rest upon his left elbow, as was customary. The tables, slightly lower than the couches, were decorated with silverware, bearing the initials of the owner, exquisite dishes of rock crystal, delicate and costly myrrhine vases, and at the center of each a graceful bronze candelabrum from Ægina, bearing a single wax candle—the burning of five wax lights—in the present case one at each table—being a symbolic feature of the nuptial feast.

After water had been poured over their hands, the banqueters were served from silver dishes with the *promulsis*, or antepast, consisting of snails, oysters and other shellfish, made tempting with savory sauces, mushrooms, delicately dressed sausages flavored with mint and rue, olives, pickles and similar incentives to an appetite, accompanied by *muslum*, a compound of honey and wine, the latter unmixed being considered too strong for an empty stomach.

Then followed in regular order the different courses of the *fercula*, or dinner proper; fish of various kinds, pullets, heathcocks and partridges, hares fattened on chestnuts, geese which had been fed with figs and dates, served with all sorts of vegetables and a variety of sauces—concocted from the juice of poppy seeds, crushed and roasted, from the blood and entrails of certain fishes, and otherwise flavored and sharpened both to whet the appetite and satisfy the most fastidious cravings. A wild boar, roasted whole, constituted the *pièce de résistance*. Enwound

spirally with a rope of myrtle and roses and militantly erect, upon a table of cypress with four ivory legs terminating in claw feet, it was borne by attendants to a central position and there ingeniously dismembered by the skillful *structor*, all of his movements engendered in rhythmic time. Finally came the *mensæ secundæ*, or dessert, including all sorts of pastries and fruits, with an abundance of the most delicate and heady wines—theretofore only sparingly partaken of because the use while eating was supposed to blunt the taste.

Between the courses the hands of the diners were washed and dried with linen napkins—since food was lifted with the fingers, there being no table implements other than spoons. In the midst of the feast a spray of perfumed water rose from a hidden pipe, later the ceiling opened and flowers rained upon the guests, while from screened alcoves sensuous music intermittently resounded. But in deference to the bride's known aversion, the not unusual introduction of a skeleton or grinning skull was dispensed with, as also for the most part were the customary interludes devoted to recitals, buffooneries and entertainments of a like sort, which long since had been tabooed as a bore by the Augusta's intimates, who always might be relied upon themselves to fill the gaps with delectable episodes.

The advice of Valens, the physician, was in frequent demand as to the most efficient method, through use of emetics and otherwise, of making room for continued gorging, by those who from time to time unblushingly withdrew for that purpose.

The tables rang with the gossip and scandal of the day, with hilarious remarks about the complacency of the absent Emperor, and contemptuous references to the hated freedmen; and towards the end of the repast, under generous indulgence in the powerful wines, and their intermixture, the conversation became more boisterous and unrestrained.

At the lower end on the right Mnester, divested of his *synthesis*, attempted to recite some ribald verses he had prepared for the occasion, but quickly was suppressed by a dish of pepper sauce flung directly into his face by Sulpicius Rufus, director of the Games, prompted by the wife of the panderer Cæsoninus, whose brazen advances had been slighted by the actor, still enmeshed in the net of the Augusta's fascinations.

First reassuring herself by a cautious glance toward the second table on the left, where she observed her husband the Senator, far gone in the fiery Setinian, dallying with one of the scantily-clad Andalusian girls who had been vainly endeavoring to perform their celebrated dancing, the fair Cæcilia, after an approving glance from Tullia, on the other side of the table, motioned Saufellus to exchange places with Montanus; the latter, nothing loath, moving over to the side of the blooming matron, who fondly caressed the head which the tipsy youth reposed upon her lap.

"By Jupiter," said Trogus as he reclined close to the beaming young wife of the unconscious Plautius, "this house to-night is like the forge of Vulcan"—making use of a fold of his companion's robe to wipe the beads from his brow with one hand, while caressing her willing arm with the other. Then, rising suddenly, he loosened her girdle and deftly unclasping the shoulder bands of her *stola*, pulled it away, the unresisting woman smiling her consent and throwing her white arms around his neck as she resigned herself to his eager embrace.

As if it were a signal for which all had been waiting, the entire assemblage burst into a roar of approbation and, all restraint cast aside, a scene of extravagant disorder ensued. Men and women simultaneously exchanged garments and places, dishes and their contents were cast about recklessly, maudlin shouts and cries were raised, ribald songs were sung, scandalous engagements openly

made, and the most reckless projects announced. Indeed it was the last stage of the orgy—that moment in which every degenerate impulse and evil passion were given full rein, and the drink-maddened participants, “sunk to beasts,” recklessly embarked in pursuit of “the pleasure which ends in pain.”

Discovering that the young knight at her side was too far gone to respond to her advances, the disappointed *pronuba* addressed a whispered inquiry to Caius, who after a word to the babbling Messalina, reclining listlessly against him, nodded his acquiescence, and beckoned the *nomenclator*. With the aid of the latter a semblance of order was restored, and rising unsteadily Tullia summoned her associates to the performance of their final offices. Not without difficulty the men got to their feet and fell in behind, while the women, led by the *pronuba*, escorted the stumbling bride to the marriage chamber. At the door of the *cubiculum*, modestly shrouded in darkness, Fescennine songs were sung, with interjections of *Talasse*, an apostrophe to the primitive Sabine deity of marriage: a last drunken shout from her male friends—not one of whom but was supposed in his time to have enjoyed the favors of the inconstant Augusta; and with the latter's disappearance the revel came to its end. The men resumed their *calcei* and *togae*, the women, wrapped in their *pallæ*, were lifted into the waiting litters and escorted by the torch-bearers and attendant slaves, accompanied by Decius Calpurnianus, the prefect of the watch, the disorderly band took its departure.

As the last loiterer disappeared, a dark figure from the direction of the kitchens came stealing up to the *ostium*.

“Calm the brute, Gyges,” said a low voice, as the watchful dog began to growl: “I have been better than my word, thanks to Philemon and the *coquus*, who are in high feather, having been promised their freedom by Caius. Here is a whole amphora of real Falernian from the

vicarius, and for Sirius a solid loin from the boar, a gift from the cook. Now mayst get drunk at thy leisure—as in the kitchen all are doing in haste.”

“May the gods attend thee,” said the old porter, affably: “would there were a wedding every day—following a thunder storm!”

THE BACCHANALIA

THE first serious difference of opinion between the newly-married couple—destined to be the last also—occurred in the morning following the marriage. The Consul, realizing the necessity for prompt action, urged that not a moment should be lost in lining up their friends, enlisting the support of the prætorians and winning over the populace—to be accomplished if possible that very day as the first essential step in supplanting Claudius.

But the wanton and light-minded Augusta was unwilling to abandon her cherished project of a Bacchic entertainment in the gardens of which she had robbed Asiaticus, long since planned for that very night. She too had her spies, and fancied she knew everything going on in the camp of the enemy. With Pallas, the ablest of the Emperor's advisers, strangely indifferent, Callistus—who barely had escaped paying the penalty of taking sides in the plot against Caligula—too timid for serious opposition to the powerful and popular Consul-elect, and Narcissus in attendance upon the slothful and imbecile Emperor, dallying with his favorites at Ostia, she urged there could be no risk in deferring for a day or two the actual springing of the plot. Moreover, the Senate was not in session and could not be convened lawfully until conclusion of the Vintage festival, then in full swing. Although Caius was unconvinced, as usual the imperious and wilful Augusta had her way, and husband and wife thereupon separated—Messalina, in her gorgeous litter accompanied by Titus Procullus, who had been designated as her guard, proceeding to the villa, Caius engaging to

join her after attending to the formalities incident to the manumission of Philemon and the *coquus*, promised the night before at the instigation of Valens. His agreed term of service ended, already the steward had departed; but it had been arranged that, notwithstanding their freedom, the assistant and the cook should remain for the entertainment in the gardens, to assist in which Caius' whole *entourage* was to be employed. Thus by the noon hour, with the exception of the *ostiarius* and an old woman in the kitchens, the house in the Carinæ was tenantless—as if in sombre preparation for its impending doom.

Ordinarily, Caius would have effected the manumission of his slaves through insertion of their names in the list of citizens during the taking of the census. But since the *lustrum* had been completed during the preceding May the alternative method, termed *vindicata*, was employed. In the presence of the prætor the men respectively were touched with a rod by the attending lictor, turned once around and then released by their master, and thereupon declared free by the magistrate.

Caius stopped to chat with the prætor, after enjoining the freedmen to make haste to the villa. Upon leaving the Tabularium the former slaves were accosted by Euodus, one of the palace servants, to whom in his elation Philemon incautiously related everything—including the removal of the *familia* to Messalina's house in the gardens and the entertainment projected for that night. Speeding them on their way with jovial felicitations, Euodus, who was in the pay of Narcissus, lounged carelessly towards the Basilica Julia, where he entered a waiting litter and hastened to the Porta Ostiensis, from whence directly a galloping courier set out on the road to the sea; while the grinning freedman, after refreshing himself at the little wineshop near the gate, complacently returned to the palace.

Early in the afternoon the friends of Messalina, who had slept off the ill-effects of the preceding night's

debauchery, in eager anticipation of even greater excesses, gathered in force in the beautiful gardens, where elaborate preparations for their entertainment had been made. In the house a wine-press had been set up, and a complete representation of the vintage, with all its merriment, its rollicking performances and unrestrained license in speech and action, was staged. Half-clad men and women, garbed as satyrs, cupids and other fabled creatures, jostled and pushed in the various operations which pertained. Some carried skins of animals containing the grapes, which were trod with naked feet before placing the husks in the press; others ladled out and carried away the "flowings off" during the process of treading, which was performed twice, while the cupids bore the "must" to nearby ovens, where it was boiled and drawn off into earthen vessels. The entire company finally united in an oblation of the new-made wine upon the family altar, thereafter preceding to the *thermae*, where the whole luxurious process of bathing was indulged in, about sunset returning to the villa for a much-needed siesta before assembling for dinner and the midnight revel in the gardens.

In his conversation with the *lanista* on the day of the Montanus funeral, the Purveyor of the Greens had accurately forecast the attitude of the freedman towards the Augusta's enterprise—notably in respect of the important rôle which his compatriot Narcissus was to play in the tragedy. What Callinus did not apprehend was that the part which he allotted to Pallas, instead of proceeding either from timidity or fear on the part of the Treasurer, was to be deliberately assumed by the latter as a safety move in the plot of Agrippina. Both to the resolute daughter of Germanicus and her confederate it was plain that whatever the outcome of Messalina's mad project, they had everything to gain and nothing to lose by holding aloof from the struggle; so that at a final conference of the three freedman Pallas favored the cautious suggestion

of Callistus that they should go no further than an attempt to induce the Augusta to throw Caius overboard and disavow the marriage. This half-measure was resolutely opposed by the Secretary, who finally declared in disgust that he would play the game out alone—and compel the other side also to play it to a finish.

Thus it was Narcissus himself who brought about the visit to Ostia, shrewdly surmising that the Emperor's absence from Rome would provoke the climax. Relying upon his carefully chosen spies to keep him promptly informed through an elaborate relay of couriers of every development at the palace, he departed with the Emperor—Calpurnia and Cleopatra, the reigning favorites, following a stage behind. Early in the evening the first courier arrived with word that the wedding was actively in preparation; and two hours later came another hard-riding messenger with advices that the tablets had been signed, the entire ritual performed and the torch-light procession already on its way to the house of the Consul.

Fatigued by the journey down and his subsequent inspection of the new harbor, the Emperor returned to his apartments in a dejected mood. Morosely dismissing his companions, Vitellius the Censor and Cæcina Largus, who had been the colleague of Claudius during his first consulship, he sat alone at dinner, eating little but drinking heavily of the strong wines with which artfully he was plied under the instructions of Narcissus. At an opportune moment, when under the influence of the fiery Setinian Claudius showed indications of regretting his voluntary isolation, Cleopatra and Calpurnia were introduced, receiving an ardent welcome from the pleased Emperor, by whom Vitellius and Largus were sent for at once, and soon an all-night carousal was under way.

On the following day the favorites, who had been carefully drilled, burst in upon the Emperor at his midday *prandium*, and throwing herself at his feet Calpurnia cried hysterically that the Augusta had betrayed him,

which, with pretended hesitation Cleopatra sobbingly confirmed, relating all the details of the marriage. In the same instant Narcissus appeared, and the stupefied amazement with which the besotted Claudius had listened to the disclosures of the women turned into a panic of fear as the Secretary reported a pretended dispatch from Callistus with news of a plot to depose the Emperor, whose death had been determined upon, in favor of the Consul. The prefect Turranius and Geta, one of the Commanders of the Guard, who were called in, reluctantly confirmed the tidings, and all united in urging immediate steps to punish the conspirators, whereby alone the threatened disaster might be averted.

Utterly unnerved and bereft of self-control, the terrified Claudius assented to everything—including temporary transfer to Narcissus of the prætorian command. At once orders were dispatched to the Camp that the house of Caius should be surrounded and the inmates put under arrest; and early the next morning—the second after the marriage—in a *carruca* drawn by four swift mules, the Emperor, Vitellius, Cæcina and the Secretary set out for the city.

On the same night during which the Emperor and his four companions at Ostia were sacrificing to Bacchus in the commonplace way, sixteen miles up Tiber, in the dark cypress groves and the moonlit gardens of Lucullus, on one of the lesser hills of the imperial city, the Augusta and the would-be Cæsar with their guests of the afternoon were celebrating a veritable Bacchanalia.

At their earliest introduction into Etruria the rites of the Bacchanalia — the Greek Dionysia — were comparatively innocent, women only participating and the celebrations held openly in the daytime. Later a Campanian priestess, inspired by the gods, changed the entire character of the worship by the admission of men and the institution of a secret celebration by night, ultimately resulting in the licentious excesses, debaucheries and

crimes which thereafter characterized its observance in Rome, to which the contagion had spread from southern Italy. One hundred and eighty-six years before Christ, shocked by the disclosures of its investigation of the cult, the Roman Senate by a decree which constitutes one of the most precious records in the ancient Latin language, known as the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, prohibited future practice of the rites by more than three women or two men, at a given time, except upon express permission of the *prætor*, confirmed by a vote of the magistrates at a session in which not less than one hundred Senators participated. The decree was rigidly enforced—not infrequently with the aid of the military—although it was some years before the ceremonial was completely abolished.

But with all Rome given up to the frolic and license of the *Feriae Vindemiales*—the Vintage festival, for Messalina and her profligate companions in the secluded privacy of the gardens on the Pincian no dread either of interference or subsequent punishment cast its shadow upon their mad and unrestrained indulgence in all the extravagances and obscenities of the traditional celebration. Guards had been posted outside the entrance, and the slaves remanded to their quarters concealed by the little wood, under penalty of torture and death for all if one should venture out before sunrise, unless summoned earlier.

Towards the middle of the second watch, with beating of drums and clashing of cymbals, from behind the villa, at the north, the procession started down the winding path, its yellow sand gleaming in the benignant light of the full October moon. Clad as Bacchanals, a few in Asiatic robes and bonnets, the others in the skins of animals, enwreathed with ivy, vine or fir, the men carrying thyrsi—blunt spears twined with ivy, with a pine cone at the top, the women bearing immodest emblems and torches, the riotous crew romped and cavorted to a

grassy opening on the shore of a shimmering pond, shut in by the dark cypress, where Silius and the Augusta were waiting.

Wearing the high *cothurni*—buskins with several soles, fastened in front with red straps—his clustering hair bound with an ivy fillet and a panther skin thrown lightly about him, Caius loomed in the moonlight as Liber, the god of wine and luxuriant fertility; Messalina by his side as the wine-god's consort Proserpina—the Greek Persephone—girt with a scanty fawn skin, her gold-yellow hair flowing beneath a chaplet of vine entwined with ears of corn, a torch in one hand, in the other a cornucopia, symbols of her divine office.

In wild acclaim their followers circled around, and with tossing of thyrsi, waving of torches and frantic shouts to Bacchus, the choral dance proceeded until, at a signal from the goddess, the women flung themselves to the lake, into which they plunged their torches, which, composed of sulphur and lime, not being extinguished, again were flourished in flaming triumph by the screaming devotees.

Then ensued an unparalleled display of frenzied wantonness and depravity—to be accounted for only as being the outcome of a veritable inebriety of the mind. Darting into the shadows the participants smeared their faces with wine lees, and by twos and threes tore about the meadow in a delirium of abandonment. With hoarse shouts and shrill cries men and women leaped about as if possessed. Flinging her torch far out upon the water, where for awhile it sputtered dully, with dishevelled locks, distorted countenance and arms raised high, her scanty covering flying in the wind, Messalina ran up and down the shore uttering frantic prophecies, Caius in sympathetic attendance brandishing his thyrsus and tossing his head in Bacchic frenzy. High above the babble a piercing shriek rang out, as Cæcilia, the fair young wife of the Consul Lateranus, in the flimsy garments of a Dryad, decked

with flowers and garlands, skimmed across the meadow and disappeared among the trees, madly pursued by Saufellus, impersonating a Satyr, with bristly hair, great protuberances on his neck, ears pointed at the top like those of an animal, two small horns projecting from his forehead and a goat's tail streaming behind. Whereupon, as if simultaneously driven by a spirit of uncontrollable madness, the entire company, uttering a mighty shout of "*Io Bacche!*" dashed among the trees and the grove rang with screams of the women and the demoniac howling of the men as they fought their way through the thick growth in the direction of the gardens beyond.

The night had been abnormally warm, but shortly after midnight, with the fall of a heavy dew, the air grew chilly, and worn out with their mad exertions the weary revellers, in response to a preconcerted signal, gladly assembled at the meadow for their return to the house.

"By Hercules 'tis cold," said Saufellus, folding a *palla* about the shivering Cæcilia, "What sayest Mnester?"

The actor's teeth chattered as he nodded wanly, while the exhausted Tullia, leaning heavily on Montanus, weakly declared she was both frozen and spent with hunger.

"Ho, ho—art children and weaklings," Valens cried boastfully—he had not once discarded his ample Eastern robe, or unduly taxed his powers, "The heat fairly stifles—'tis an amphora of chilled Falernian most is needed!"

"Cool him off in the lake!" cried the indignant Tullia, and with a shout of savage delight the men rushed at the misguided physician, who barely escaped their clutches by grasping the low-spreading branches of a cypress, and swinging himself aloft. As the active young Traulus, egged on by both men and women, essayed to follow, Valens, entirely bereft of his robe and frantic with fear and anger, climbed rapidly to the very top, amidst the jeers and sardonic laughter of his persecutors.

"What seest from thy lofty perch, old buzzard?" Cæsoninus shouted derisively.

Valens muttered wrathfully; then, with a flash of malicious inspiration, staring off towards the southwest he cried in pretended fear, "I see a great storm coming up from Ostia!"

Upon the passion-worn and conscience-stricken listeners, always in superstitious dread of omens and inauspicious portents, the words fell with the shock of an unexpected blow. For an instant they stood aghast—the frightened women pressing close to the men, who stared dubiously at each other; then, at a low cry from Cæcilia, as by common consent, all turned and hastened up the path. As they neared the villa from behind sounds of an altercation floated through the empty courts from the *ostium*; and hastening on in advance Caius found one of the guards with a strange slave in animated dispute with the janitor.

"'Tis a pressing message from the Censor Vitellius to the Augusta in person," said the guard, "and this dull brute bars our entrance."

Without speaking Silius turned back, and after a whispered word to Messalina, who with the others had gained the atrium, summoned the messenger and pointed out to him the Augusta. The man, who was bleeding from several roughly-bandaged wounds, and could barely stand from weakness, looked doubtfully at the Empress in her scanty attire.

"Yes, I am the Augusta," she said, with blanched face, and in a trembling voice which she strove in vain to control; "thou art Hesperus, of whom the Censor hath spoken to me—observe," and holding up her left hand she took a ring from her first finger and slipped it on the third. "Now speak freely—these are friends and all alike are concerned."

The slave's expression of distrust changed to one of relief and he answered tersely, "My master commanded me to tell the Augusta he dared not write, that orders were preparing to arrest the Consul Caius and his friends

tonight—and that Cæsar returns to Rome in the morning.”

The breathless silence that ensued was broken by Caius, who calmly inquired, “When didst thou leave Ostia?”

“’Twas the eleventh hour; long since I should have arrived, but twice was waylaid,” he replied placatingly.

Led by the women, with pallid faces and incoherent cries, the company ran to the retiring rooms, and donning their robes, in a paroxysm of fear, rushed blindly from the villa, without a word of farewell to the half-fainting Augusta, left alone with Caius and the tribune Procullus.

Summoning the slaves, Caius first saw that proper care was given to the Censor’s messenger, who, faint from loss of blood, had collapsed after telling his story. Then he gave attention to the Augusta, who, plied with wine and under the influence of the Consul’s courage and composure, regained enough self-control to discuss the danger which hung over them. Quickly it was decided that Caius should hasten to the Camp, in the forlorn hope of winning over Rufius and the prætorians, and in case of his failure Messalina, accompanied by her children, should intercept Claudius on the road from Ostia, and use all of her blandishments to divert the Emperor’s anger and convince him that he had been misled by the freedman.

Alone in the villa, awaiting the result of the Consul’s effort, Messalina gave herself to the darkest forebodings, which speedily took shape as stern realities upon the return of Caius with the alarming news that Rufius had been superseded in the command by Narcissus; that already the Consul’s house was in possession of the guards, who soon would be scouring the city in search of himself and their late companions. “For me the end is in sight,” he concluded calmly; “and, as it would seem to me after further thought, that which would promise most for thee is to induce the *Vestalis Maxima* to intercede with Cæsar for thy pardon.”

“Vibidia likes me not and upon my appeal she would

not lift a hand," the Empress rejoined despondently. "Although perchance Octavia might influence her," she added.

"Come then," he said gently, "I have brought a litter and will take thee to the palace, where thou wilt find both safety and companionship, and with Octavia and that shrewd friend of hers, thy plans may be perfected."

She regarded him gratefully, then overcome by her emotions, gave way to a flood of passionate weeping, in manifest contrition—perhaps for the first time in all her conscienceless career—sobbing remorsefully, "I have brought thee to thy death."

"Who knows?" he answered lightly with true Roman stoicism; "the Fates have their own way, and as they will shall it be."

MESSALINA IN THE GARDEN

AMONG those who had been admitted to the inner circle of the Augusta's favors was Decius Calpurnianus, the prefect of the watch. One of the official witnesses to the marriage contract, and among the privileged guests at the wedding feast, the prefect also had been a participant in the Bacchic revels; and in a moment of banter with the Consul had confided to the latter the watchword for the night, "upon the chance that thou and the Augusta, tiring of a mere garden entertainment, may conclude to indulge in a moonlight ride to Ostia," as he had observed jestingly. Thus in turn supplied with the countersign, Procullus experienced no difficulty in passing the gate, and equally fortunate in securing a horse from the nearby military stable, made quick time to the villa.

Awakened from a restless and troubled sleep by the commotion which attended the tribune's arrival in the night-watches, Octavia listened with a tightening at the heart while the motherly Pomponia broke the news of the Augusta's imminent danger, as bluntly related to Marcus by the tribune. But, strange to say, this time it was the sensitive daughter of Cæsar who sustained the shock, and esayed the rôle of comforter to a terrified, weeping Pythias. Now that the long-dreaded blow actually had fallen, in the shadow of the catastrophe for which instinctively she was prepared, the proud spirit of her nobler ancestors disclosed itself in the composure with which, white-faced but tearless and without an apparent tremor, the young girl herself assumed the leadership

and hastened the preparations for their departure. Ashamed of her momentary display of weakness, Pythias lent her busy assistance; and following swiftly at the heels of the galloping Procullus, attended by Marcus they arrived at the palace in the grey of early dawn.

Messalina refused to see her daughter, while directing that Pythias and Marcus should come to her at once. The tribune quickly reappeared with a written message for Octavia, after reading which with no display of emotion, she calmly announced her readiness to start immediately; and a litter being speedily procured, they hastened down the Via Nova and as day was breaking arrived at the home of Vesta. Marcus remained at the gate—no man ever crossing the threshold of the Atrium—while after persistent knocking, grudgingly the door was opened to Octavia by a wondering, sleepy-eyed old woman. A little later the door swung back again, and as Octavia hurried towards him it was plain to the observant tribune that she had been weeping freely. But although there was a quiver in her voice, she held herself bravely while saying, “Tell the Augusta Vibidia will go, and that I shall stay with her until we come for Britannicus. And O, Marcus, be thou and Pythias very kind and helpful to her”; then, not trusting herself to say more, she ran back into the Atrium.

Appearance in the Forum of a horse-drawn vehicle indicated the imperial presence or that of one of the Vestals, of whom each possessed a carriage and was privileged to drive in the city. And since it was common knowledge that Cæsar was in Ostia, the attendants at the temples and other public buildings and a few early loungers heard with surprise the clatter of hoofs coming up from the Tuscus, before ever the sun had capped the Palatine. When the *pilentum*, drawn by a pair of milk-white horses, swung around the temple of the Dioscuri, a little group of curiosity seekers eagerly followed to the corner of the Vicus Vestalis, and with growing astonish-

ment observed Octavia and the Head Vestal herself climb into the carriage, which straightway rattled down the lane to the Nova Via and turned up the hill towards the palace. Before the excitement occasioned by so unusual an event had subsided, the *pilentum* reappeared along the descent to the Velia, whence it could be seen moving rapidly over the Sacra Via until it disappeared at the bend in the direction of the Appian Way.

A few hours before, the early vendors of eggs, fruit and vegetables coming in from the country stared curiously at a tall, stern-faced officer in attendance upon two closely-veiled women, who at the east of the Great Circus were hurrying toward the Porta Ostiensis. Messalina had refused to make use of the litter provided by the tribune, and when the latter remonstrated against her undertaking the long journey on foot, with a flash of the old imperiousness she bade him obey his orders—subjoining bitterly that instead of preceding them, as customarily, he should fall in behind, so that, if thus-minded, he might “slink away like the others.”

It was a long, hard journey, and just beyond the gate, yielding to the entreaties of Pythias, the exhausted woman climbed into a jolting, two-wheeled cart, bound for some gardens on beyond; and thus the fallen Empress, deserted by all except the two devoted friends of her neglected child, rode to meet her fate. Perchance in her darkly brooding silence, upon the retina of her retrospection, there may have been projected the tableau of another memorable ride—barely four years gone—when over a part of the selfsame course traversed in the present debasing journey, in all the insolent splendor of the Emperor’s consort she had ridden through the cheering multitudes of the magnificent gilded *carpentum*—the first woman to attain that exalted privilege in the long history of Rome.

At the first *quadriva* outside the gate the muck cart turned aside into the fields. Taking advantage of the

customary crossroads' provision for travelers of a bench shaded by trees beside a fountain, here they waited in sombre silence until the imperial outriders came in sight, the *carruca* close behind.

Leaning heavily upon Pythias, the Augusta seemed on the verge of collapse; but as the tribune lifted his hand in salute and signalled the carriage to stop, mustering all her strength she flung aside her cloak and veil and staggering into the roadway fell on her knees, with arms uplifted calling loudly to Claudius to listen to the mother of his children.

But Narcissus was on the alert and had recognized her. Before the astounded Emperor could utter a word, the freedman sharply ordered the charioteer to drive on, and the carriage rolled swiftly by, leaving the wretched Messalina grovelling in despair upon the stones.

With a quick rush of tears, Pythias bent over the prostrate figure and cried despairingly:

"Oh, what shall we do Marcus? She can walk no farther—nor would dare return to the palace!"

When passing the gate Marcus had observed a litter drawn up to one side, its bearers reclining in the shade of the pyramid of Caius Cestius.

"Mayhap I can induce them to take us over the crossroad to the Appia, and thence back to Pomponia's villa," he said inquiringly: and upon her eager acquiescence he hurried away.

The litter was awaiting the return of an overseer who had driven on beyond to inspect some repairs to the road; and the *lecticarii* at first demurred to the risk of leaving their post. But tempted by the promise of a generous *donatio* and reassured by the tribune's assumption of responsibility, they finally consented to go at least as far as the junction of the crossroad with the Appia, which was near the entrance to Pomponia's villa.

Half an hour later the Empress was reclining on a grassy bank beyond the first bend of the shaded lane,

out of sight from the Appia; and Marcus hastened on alone, speedily returning with a *sella*, in which, despite her feeble protests, Messalina was carried to the house. " 'Tis the only way for the present, Augusta," urged the young man earnestly; "rest here with assurance until I return with word from the Vestal," and wearily she resigned herself to the tender care of Pythias and the unobtrusive ministrations of the noble-minded matron for whom always she had cherished only scorn and contempt.

After passing Messalina the imperial *cortège* advanced rapidly towards the city, and as it approached the ancient gateway the motley crowd which had congregated stared in awe as the tall and venerable priestess, clothed all in white, wearing the cornet-shaped *infula* with its dangling ribbons, and a hooded veil, rectangular in form, made of a white woolen cloth with a purple border, appeared in the entrance behind her advancing lictor, his emblem of office borne on the left shoulder until lowered in the customary salute.

At the lictor's signal the *carruca* halted with a jar, and mastering the situation at a glance Narcissus apprehended that the decisive moment had arrived. He knew the weak points in the imperial armor, that considerations affecting his children yet were potent with Claudius, and that he never failed in abject submission to the priesthood, the visible representative authority of the immortal gods. Also he was fully informed as to the extraordinary powers and privileges of the Vestals, who, apart from their vow of chastity and their liability to testify as witnesses—although not under the necessity of taking the oath—were amenable to no law, nor even subject to the authority of the Censor, while the slightest offense against their person was punished by death.

But he knew also that the austere Maxima, the sobriety and purity of whose life invariably had accorded with the highest traditions of the order, always had looked coldly upon the headstrong and unprincipled Empress, whose

dissolute conduct and careless disregard even of appearances had been especially abhorrent to the lofty-minded votaries of the goddess who presided over the family hearth. Accordingly convinced that personally Vibidia was unconcerned at the present plight of the Augusta, and shrewdly divining that Octavia was responsible for the Vestal's intervention, Narcissus concluded that instead of resenting, secretly the latter would welcome a display of firmness on the part of the Emperor, which at once would cloak her own lukewarm interest and happily relieve her from further efforts in a perfunctory service.

But in this the freedman's usual penetrating insight was at fault. Trained in the rigid precepts of an order whose votaries throughout the centuries had reflected so rare a purity and sincerity of mind and soul, the venerable but still energetic and forceful abbess would tolerate no affront to the power she represented, nor be a party to chicanery or dissimulation in the discharge of a duty once assumed, howsoever distastefully. Moreover, Vibidia possessed a much clearer understanding of the Secretary's motives and methods than Narcissus accredited her.

Whispering to the moody and preoccupied Claudius that one of the Vestals was approaching to intercede for an obscure malefactor, from the burden of which he, Narcissus, would relieve Cæsar, and motioning Vitellius and Largus to distract the Emperor's attention, as Vibidia came forward, with Octavia and Britannicus on either side, leaning over the side rail, the freedman said coldly:

"Cæsar is overtired and prefers not to hear thee now—suggesting thou shalt come to the palace later in the day"; at the same time covertly signalling the driver to proceed.

Perplexed and fearful, the charioteer nervously gathering up his reins, pulled too sharply on one, and the off-side mule, jumping suddenly to the right, barely grazed the extended *fasces* of the impassive lictor.

The tall figure of the priestess seemed to take on added

height as bending her eyes full on the terrified slave she said in icy tones:

“If the mule had but touched him, wretch, not Cæsar himself could halt thy death. As for thee”—turning her level gaze upon the sullen freedman, “since when hath a slavish Greek assumed to speak for Cæsar, addressed by the head priestess of Vesta? And thou, a Censor, sitting by inertly,” with a withering glance at the cowering Vitellius. “Down on the pavement all of you”—with a flash of the steel-grey eyes, “and move out of hearing while Vesta speaks with the Pontifex”; and without a word the companions of the Emperor climbed from the carriage and walked to the side of the road—Narcissus angry and resentful, Vitellius apparently crest-fallen but secretly pleased, Largus indifferent but inclined rather to be amused than otherwise.

Huddled in the corner of the carriage, with blinking eyes and the vacuous look which of late had become his habitual expression, Claudius stared at the Vestal quietly awaiting recognition—finally blurting out: “Why comest thou to me? Caius Silius now is Emperor and Pontifex—lodge thy appeal with him.”

“Cæsar hath been misinformed,” she answered quietly; “even now the Consul is in the hands of the prætorians. Moreover, I come not alone to the Pontifex Maximus, but to the father of Octavia and Britannicus, who have their own appeal to make.”

“I will not hear them,” he answered fretfully—“at least not now. If what thou sayest of Silius be true, let them come for *prandium* at the palace.”

For a moment the Vestal pondered, Octavia with down-cast eyes standing rigidly, while Britannicus, who understood nothing, in childish curiosity was questioning the lictor about the mules. In the Emperor’s present mood there appeared scant likelihood that Octavia would be able to make an effective impression upon her father, even if he could be induced to hear her. And with the

angry and resourceful freedman close at hand and the curious rabble hanging intently on every word, the circumstances were not favorable for any extended discussion. Moreover, in the end it would be Messalina alone who might hope to avert the blow which threatened her: to gain time and insure for the Augusta an opportunity to exert her own persuasive powers was the main thing; and her decision made in an instant, the Vestal asked abruptly:

“Hath Cæsar talked with the Augusta?”

Claudius shook his head, his hands toying nervously with the dice on a playing board resting on his lap, with which the freedman had sought to beguile his thoughts during the journey:

“We passed her below, but did not stop—already we were late,” he answered evasively.

Compelling him with the intensity of her gaze, her voice vibrant with the mystic authority of her office, she charged him earnestly:

“Thou art the Pontifex Maximus, and to thee, as to a father, the Flamens and priestess of Vesta, bend the knee. Thine is the final decision, but ours the privilege and solemn duty to remind that in earthly affairs the true will of the immortal gods may find expression only through the exercise of justice. I, the Head Priestess of the Sacred Flame, earnestly admonish that thy consort, the mother of thy children, shall not be condemned unheard by Cæsar. Ill would it become the head of the Sacred College to open his ears to every malicious whisper and slanderous charge against the Augusta and close them to her right of defense and her children’s appeal for mercy.” And with all the subtle power and insistence of her lofty character and impressive personality, she drove home the warning in her closing words: “There is none so high may escape the awakened anger of the gods!”

Measurably aroused alike from his moral lethargy and mental stupor by the forceful vehemence of the

Vestal, Claudius sat erect, and with a semblance of dignity, said huskily:

“Cæsar will do justice. Take my children to the palace and thyself return to the solemnities of the goddess, assured that none shall be punished unheard by Tiberius Claudius Nero, the legate on earth of the immortal gods.”

Falling back with grave respect, the Vestal answered quietly:

“Rather shall I follow Cæsar, as is befitting”; and motioning the lictor to stand aside, she extended her hand to Octavia, who in glad relief had thrown her arms about the wondering boy.

“Not so,” replied Claudius grandiloquently; “go thou in advance, that all Rome may observe Cæsar gives precedence to Vesta, and the Pontifex Maximus to the Virgo Maxima.”

With stately obeisance Vibidia withdrew to the waiting *pilentum*, which departed immediately, followed closely by the imperial *cortège*, thereby appearing as an escort to the Vestal. Under the whispered instructions of Narcissus, instead of turning off at the Great Circus, which would have been the most direct route to the palace, the driver of the *carruca*, followed the other carriage along the road between the Palatine and Cælian as far as its junction with the Sacra Via, then swung to the right and kept straight up the hill towards the house of Caius Silius in the Carinæ.

On their way to the city Claudius had refused to discuss with his companions what had occurred at the gate, at first replying only in monosyllables to their questions, and finally with a show of irritability commanding silence, that he “might have an opportunity to reflect.” But even so unusual a display of firmness gave slight concern to the freedman, confident of his ability to regain the ascendancy through the unfolding of his carefully formulated plans.

With the exception of two or three lounging guards in

the vestibule, there was no sign of life about the Consul's home—only two short days before the scene of such bustling activity; even the *ostiarius* and the bristling dog were missing from the *ostium*. At the Secretary's command the inner doors were opened and as Claudius walked through the vacant courts, still decked with wreaths and flowers with which the house had been adorned for the wedding festivity, pointing here and there to the many cherished objects which Messalina recklessly had purloined, the crafty freedman fanned into a blaze the embers of the imperial wrath as with steady vehemence he declaimed scornfully:

“The Augusta hath stripped the palace of its heirlooms of the Drusi and the Claudii Neronæ, and in stuffing his house with the plunder the traitor Caius hath brazenly connived in this profanation of thine ancestors.”

In a wild rush of anger, with dreadful menaces Claudius ran back to the carriage, frantically shouting to the charioteer to drive with all speed to the *castra*, the grimly rejoicing Secretary inciting him to further outbursts of frenzied rage as the active mules raced through the *subura*, and up the Vicus Patricius to the prætorian camp.

Already assembled by direction of Narcissus, the soldiers greeted Cæsar with thunderous applause, and the hill rang with their mighty shout, “Hail Germanicus—death to his enemies!”

“The culprits are at hand; let Cæsar order their instant execution and all danger will be past,” the freedman whispered darkly. But even in the consuming madness of his anger, mindful of his promise to the Vestal, Claudius shook his head, commanding only that the prisoners be placed on trial.

Silius first brought before the tribunal made no defense—begging only that he might be dispatched without delay. As one by one the others appeared, their guilt also was established—all but two of the ten witnesses to

the marriage being speedily convicted and sentenced to immediate execution; and amidst the roars of savage joy from the prætorians which followed the fateful "*Actum est!*" Cæsar gloomily re-entered his carriage and set out for the palace.

The hours dragged heavily for the distracted Augusta, anxiously awaiting the tribune's return. Plautius was absent—he had gone to the city on hearing of the plight of his nephew Lateranus, who was one of those in the toils—and from a sense of delicacy Pomponia kept in the background as much as possible. Upon Pythias accordingly devolved the burden of attendance upon Messalina, in her varying moods of fury and despair. One moment the Augusta raged up and down, execrating her enemies and apostrophizing the gods for vengeance; the next, yielding to the terrors which assailed her, she abandoned herself to passionate weeping—with each succeeding outburst the young girl finding it increasingly difficult to sooth and restrain her. She drank a little wine but refused to eat; and at last, as the shadows began to lengthen, declared impetuously she would wait no longer but return at once to the palace—on foot and unattended if such were the only way.

Although greatly doubting, Pomponia ordered the family carriage, which turned into the vestibule at the moment a galloping horse emerged from the elms at the foot of the slope; and as the Empress hurried through the *ostium*, covered with dust and sombre of visage Marcus alighted and saluted stiffly.

"Thou hast been absent overlong," said the Augusta weakly.

"I have been at the palace awaiting the Emperor's arrival: it was upon the advice of the General Plautius that I remained," he replied.

The pallid face went white as she asked haltingly, "Where then did Cæsar go when he reached the City?"

"He drove first to the Consul's house in the Carinæ, and

thence to the Camp on the Esquiline," the tribune answered with slow emphasis.

The question trembled on her lips, but not yet could she bring herself to put it: instead she inquired whether Vibidia had sent a message.

"The Vestal bade me say that Cæsar promised to hear thee—but that Narcissus is to be feared. She urgently counsels thou shalt remain here overnight and tomorrow induce Plautius to accompany thee to the palace."

Appearing not to heed, for a little she stood with down-cast eyes; then with an effort inquired breathlessly, "And Caius?"

"He is dead," said the tribune bluntly.

Messalina trembled violently, and with eyes dilating caught at her breast as she whispered hoarsely, "What of the others?"

"All have followed Silius except the Consul Lateranus and Cæsoninus; Plautius, because he is the General's nephew, and the other—for reasons of Cæsar's own."

Tossing her arms in abandon, Messalina startled the tribune with a burst of horrid, eerie laughter, and cried mockingly:

"Cæsoninus spared because he is so unspeakably vile and despicable—who then shall say that the Augusta also may not escape?" And to Pythias who came running at the discordant cries, "Come, let us be gone; for me also, as Caius forecast for himself, the end is in sight."

In vain they pleaded with her—she would stay no longer in the lonely, hateful spot, but go directly to her own house in the gardens to meet her mother; and accompanied still by her two faithful attendants, the desperate, maddened woman turned her back upon the security of the peaceful villa and recklessly set out to challenge her destiny.

At the city gate they changed to a curtained litter which Marcus had kept in waiting for an emergency, an agile and trusted Greek boy of Pomponia's going

on ahead with a letter to Lepida. After passing the Circus, in hope of escaping notice Marcus kept to the left as far as the Porticus of Octavia, turning thence in the direction of the Pantheon and crossing the Flaminian Way, took the road up the hill to the Gardens. As they started to climb the hill a dark figure which had followed stealthily all the way from the Porta Capena made off hurriedly in the direction of the Palatine.

The shadows had fallen when they halted at the gate of the villa, and startled by the sound of voices floating up in the darkness from the road below, they saw a lantern bobbing along in advance of an indistinct moving mass. With a frightened exclamation the Augusta caught the tribune by the arm; but when the figure of a gigantic *lanternarius* loomed up out of the darkness, she cried in relief:

“’Tis Caletus—my mother hath come. Tell her I am waiting in the arbor near the fountain—then haste to the palace for Octavia and Britannicus. May the gods reward thee both for thy kindness”; and she vanished in the vestibule.

News of the death of Caius and his companions in misfortune had preceded Cæsar’s departure from the camp, and his journey home was one continuous ovation. The careless Messalina never had courted the friendship of the populace; and while the Consul living, handsome and open-handed, had enjoyed universal popularity, Caius dead, his memory proscribed and property confiscated, was speedily forgotten by the fickle mob, always under the sway of self-interest and the emotions of the hour.

When the *cortège* turned from the Carinæ into the Forum the classic area was so thronged with excited, demonstrative patriots that the lictors found difficulty in clearing a passage for the Emperor, whose sombre melancholy gradually yielded to the fervor of his reception. He arrived at the palace in a state of high complacency, passed the remainder of the day in the restful

luxuries of the bath, and finally sat down to a sumptuous repast with renascent zest and eagerness. In the warmth of the wine his contentment increased, and under a sudden impulse of affection he sent word to Eunice to bring his daughter to the triclinium.

To Octavia, who after departure of the Vestal had spent the day in the garden, alternately brooding and restlessly wandering about in anxious expectation of either a summons from her father or word from the villa, the Emperor's message came as a welcome relief at a moment when the suspense had become well-nigh unbearable. She was received kindly by Claudius, who inquired with apparent interest about her visit to Pomponia, spoke of Britannicus with a show of affection, and finally dismissed her with a command to bring her brother for the midday meal on the morrow.

On the point of withdrawing, with a momentary access of courage, she raised her eyes to his face and stammered: "And my mother—Vibidia said—shall she come with us?"

Draining another cup of the amber-colored wine, Cæsar waved his hand carelessly, answering with affected nonchalance, "Yes, let her come and plead her cause in presence of her children."

Her tears flowing blindly, Octavia fell on her knees and kissed the Emperor's hand—then in a great surge of relief hastened back to her apartments.

To Narcissus, listening behind a screen, the words of Claudius came as the final call to action. He knew that if afforded a free opportunity to exercise her fascinations upon his befuddled and impressionable master, the Augusta would not fail to win—and as surely his own downfall would follow. It was her death—or his; and as his fellow countryman had surmised to the *lanista*, the freedman now was playing with loaded dice.

Gliding from the room, he hastened to the lower end of the corridor, where his tool Euodos was waiting, and questioned sharply, "Hast news from the villa?"

"She hath gone to the gardens of Asiaticus to meet Domitia Lepida."

"Of a truth the gods are with us," breathed the freed-man in fervent triumph; "summon the guard—or stay, I will go with thee," and they ran to the vestibule, where Narcissus said incisively to the tribune, on duty with three centurions, "Cæsar commands the adulterous Messalina shall be put to death without delay. Go at once with thy men, under guidance of Euodus, who will lead thee to the Augusta, and report to me on thy return"; and he smiled malignantly as the little band hastily left the courtyard.

Pythias and the tribune arrived at the palace while Octavia was with the Emperor. The indefatigable Marcus speedily assembled the escort and completed his preparations—Pythias in a fever of impatience awaiting her friend's return, with the young Britannicus eager to embark upon this delightful night excursion. Although slightly relieved by Octavia's story, Marcus had been too deeply impressed by the Vestal's warning to lose a moment in expediting their departure—with the result that they barely missed taking the lead down the Nova Via from Euodos and his band—of whose precedence, however, they were unaware. But encumbered by their charges, passage through the unlighted streets was retarded, and as they approached the foot of the long hill leading to the gardens, those in advance already were banging at the gates.

Domitia Lepida—usually referred to by her *cognomen* alone, in distinction from a less brilliant and notorious sister of the same name—was own cousin to Claudius through their mothers, the two Antonias, children of Marc Antony and the sister of the first Emperor. Lepida's second husband, the father of Octavia's affianced, lost his life through the machinations of Messalina, because of and since which mother and daughter had been estranged. But in the hour of the latter's danger and des-

pair everything was forgotten, and Lepida had responded instantly to her daughter's frantic appeal.

Leaving her escort at the gate, attended by the giant Gaul bearing his lantern, Lepida moved on to the little arbor, which stood on the spot once occupied by the marble *Parcæ*—afterwards the site of the funeral pyre of the murdered *Asiaticus*—and bent over the prostrate figure of the *Augusta*, in her abject misery lying prostrate on the ground, moaning and babbling incoherently.

Unstrung by the frightful emotions of the day, and worn out by her exertions and protracted fasting, the wretched woman rested her head on her mother's lap and gave full vent to her misery. She would not die—she could not die—she was too young—she had done no wrong—*Cæsar* himself had consented—if only she might gain his ear for but a single moment everything could be made right; and with a fresh outburst of tears and passionate lamentations she slid from her mother's knees and again despairingly cast herself upon the earth. It was not an awakened conscience that tortured her—nor even the sting of remorse. The frantic craving for life came not from the desire to make amends. Unlike a true penitent of that new and wondrous faith which had been born in Galilee, she had no earnest and compelling wish to turn her back upon the past and begin a new life—not as a propitiation, nor even as reparation, but simply in confession of the truth which has been found. All this would have been incomprehensible under the *Augusta's* pagan belief and materialistic philosophy. The one emotion which was driving her was that of sheer, naked, terrifying fear—the dread of physical pain, of the ending of sensuous pleasures, of the awful blackness of the unknown.

To all of her daughter's mad ravings Lepida answered little. Her own life had not been wanting in stormy experiences, her perceptions were keen and she had clearly foreseen the inevitable outcome of the *Augusta's* folly. She had not come to extend any pretense of hope, but with the

single purpose of imparting a spark of her own haughty pride and courage, in the exercise of which the sufferer might forestall her fate with Roman fortitude and stoicism.

The night was dark, the atmosphere oppressive, and out of the lowering clouds in the east which banked the rising moon, the wind moaned fretfully, presaging a storm. As Lepida sat meditating how best to broach her project, from the villa gates came the sound of blows, a deep voice shouting, "Open, in the name of Cæsar!"

With a shriek of terror Messalina dragged herself to her mother's feet and frantically clutched at her robes. Beckoning the watchful Caletus, Lepida whispered, "Give me thy dagger"; then pressing the blade into her daughter's hand she said earnestly, "*conclamatum est*—it is all over; strike before thou art defiled by the executioner!"

The gates gave way with a crash, and guided by the rays of the lantern the posse was upon them quickly. The tribune curtly recited his orders; and as he advanced with uplifted weapon, momentarily restraining him with outstretched hand, Lepida bent over the writhing figure and said in a resolute voice:

"Thou hast heard—strike quickly—and hard!"

With a shudder Messalina dealt herself one or two feeble blows, barely scratching the skin of her throat and breast—whereupon in pity the prætorian ran her through with his short sword. As she lay weltering, Euodos, the former slave, pressed forward, and with a shower of taunts and vulgar abuse, spurned the dying woman with his foot.

Frantic with rage Lepida threw herself at him, screaming madly, "Kill the foul wretch, Caletus!"

Euodos swerved and flung up his arms in a panic as the Gaul lunged forward; the ponderous fist with the force of a pile driver caught the freedman at the point of the jaw, just below the right ear, and he fell, an inert

mass, alongside the Augusta, yet quivering in the death agony. Then lifted in the powerful arms of the giant, the lifeless body of the spy was flung far out upon the grass.

A low murmur arose from the guards, who drew their swords and pressed close to their leader. The tribune shook his head in perplexity. He knew the intrepid nature of Antonia's daughter, and of her near relationship to Cæsar. Also at heart he approved the retribution which so swiftly had overtaken the freedman's uncalled-for brutality. And yet his own duty was plain.

"*Perpol*," he said at last, measuring the alert Gaul with open admiration; "'twas a shrewd blow and rightly punished so foul a deed. But he was Cæsar's freedman, and the slave who kills a citizen must answer to the law."

"Thou art wrong," said Lepida with cold insistence, "Caletus himself is a freedman; at the last *lustrali* I caused his name to be enrolled by the Censor. Moreover, thou knowest well yon foul scum had no orders from Cæsar to dishonor the corse of Octavia's granddaughter, and 'tis thyself who art most in danger. Go now, and report to Cæsar that the mother of Messalina claims the body of her daughter"—after a pause adding significantly and with cutting sarcasm, "Take the carrion to the one who sent thee, with word 'tis a gift from Lepida, who chooses to hire her own *pollinctor* to prepare her daughter's corse for the funeral pyre."

Bending in respectful acquiescence, the tribune withdrew—his men bearing the body of Euodos as far as the vestibule, where slaves, summoned by Caletus, assumed the burden. As the party approached the entrance Marcus arrived, slightly in advance of his escort. The shattered gate, the body of the freedman and the presence of the tribune scarcely required the latter's hasty confirmation to apprise him they had come too late.

For a moment he stood irresolute. But the others were close upon him, and the Emperor's daughter, keenly alive

to the significance of what he himself had observed, had her own swift intuitions. With a low exclamation she ran to the arbor, and in the dull light of the lantern saw the white shape lying prone in its dark and still widening pool, the eyes fixed and staring, the features distorted in the last rigors of an agonizing death.

For a moment Octavia gazed in silent horror—then with a pitiful cry staggered back to intercept the terrified Britannicus and shield him from the revolting vision which she knew would go with her to the grave.

THE LOVERS

TOWARD the end of an afternoon some two months after the event on the Pincian, great throngs of people were pouring forth from the places of amusement in the Campus Martius. Rome had been enjoying one of those innumerable *feriæ imperativæ*, so-called— the “occasional holidays” proclaimed by the authorities with the approval of the pontifices to beguile the restless populace during the intervals between the *feriæ conceptivæ*, or “movable festivals” and those which recurred on fixed dates.

There had been pantomimes and mimic shows in the theatres, a notable chariot race in the Circus, with combats of gladiators and baiting of wild beasts in the amphitheatre; and since the favorite had won the race, the wild beasts had taken some bloody toll of their persecutors and the gladiatorial combats had resulted in many deaths, the crowds were in a high state of complacency.

Through favor of the gods the late December day had been wonderfully mild and balmy, and the thoughtless, pleasure-loving Romans were enjoying it to the full as they lounged in the sunshine, congregating in the porticoes and squares and at the neighborhood shrines, or slowly wending their way toward the Forum for the customary afternoon assemblage there before betaking themselves to their homes or the *popinæ* for refreshment.

Those bound for the Forum moved in two great streams, one over the Argentarius to the north of the Capitol, the other through the Boarium and by way of the Vicus

Jugarius below the Tarpeian rock. Drifting along with the latter were Marcus and a prætorian comrade who had been attracted to the amphitheatre by the first appearance of a prodigy who fought with bare fists against adversaries wearing the loaded *cæstus*.

Marcus was on his way to the palace, his comrade bound for the Camp on the Esquiline; and they stood for a moment exchanging commonplaces before separating, the while idly watching from below the Temple of Saturn a procession of priests descending from the Capitol, where four white bulls had been sacrificed to Jupiter Latialis.

"By Pollux," said the prætorian pointing to the leading Flamen, "in brawn and bone yon priest would match up well with the *lanista's* boxer. But methinks 'tis as Gallus boasts; while equalled by many and outclassed by some in height and weight, *certe* the Gaul is unrivalled in the hardness of his fists and the driving power behind them. That Sarmathian who went down at his second blow was yet in a stupor when we came away."

"If he had been struck by one I know, his stupor would have been endless," said Marcus carelessly.

"*Perpol*," said the other with a smile, "and thou canst produce such an one, wilt become the most popular man in Rome. Although I mind me Gallus did speak of another Gaul who also hath a heavy blow—the former slave of Lepida; in truth, 'tis affirmed the *lanista* tempted him with as much as Pallas steals in a month. But the man only laughed and hath gone for the winter with his mistress to her estate in Calabria."

"'Tis the one I had in mind," said Marcus; "I would match him with bare fists against any two boxers in Rome, and if fought to a finish, give odds Caletus would put Charon in the way of earning two fares at the crossing."

"*Certe*, he must be a marvel," observed the other admiringly. "I have heard it whispered that 'twas he who put Euodos asleep; few believe the story given out at the palace that a stone falling from a roof killed him. I

myself questioned Decius, who knew only that his centurions stumbled over the body in the dark on the way home from the gardens."

"A falling stone or the fist of Caletus—'twould mean the same to a man whose head was in the way," said Marcus grimly. "As to Euodos, who cares which it was? He was a low-born wretch who long before would have tasted death but for Cæsar's sheltering ægis—at what art thou staring?" following his companion's intent gaze down the street in front of the Basilica; and as the other darted forward with a shout, Marcus followed crying loudly, "Varus! by all the gods!"

With an answering shout a young man in uniform worked his way towards them through the motley crowd, and to the boisterous extravagance of their welcome responded with a warmth which attested the depth and sincerity of his emotion, while the prætorian cried jocosely, "In the name of Jupiter, whence comest thou? Thy bones are supposed to be rotting in the German forest!"

After the eventful day in the Circus, with its jubilant climax in the embowered path behind the palace, Varus soon realized that his had been a pyrrhic victory. Although with the consent of the Emperor, as Guardian, Pythias had accepted the customary betrothal ring of iron—the *anulus pronubus*, worn as a symbolic pledge of their sincerity upon the fourth finger of the left hand, supposed to be connected by a nerve with the heart—the consequent change in their relations carried no right and in itself occasioned no opportunities to enjoy each other's society. Under the Roman customs of the time, even after formal betrothal there was no such thing for lovers as "keeping company," which delectable usage evolved only under the influence of Christianity. As St. Jerome observes with humorous sarcasm, "Before a man bought an ox or a slave, he tested them; but his future

wife he was not permitted to see for fear she might displease him before marriage!"

Moreover on the rare occasions when through the favor of the gods, evoked by his own persistent machinations, Junius had a glimpse of his divinity, she bore herself with such punctilious reserve as to exasperate him beyond measure; so that finally in high dudgeon he applied for a transfer and was sent to the legions on the Rhine.

In the operations against the Chaucians, the young centurion's zeal and energy attracted the attention of Corbulo, who was a strict disciplinarian, and soon won for Varus a staff position, thus placing him in line for promotion to a military tribuneship after conclusion of his first campaign. While the war continued Junius found plenty to occupy his mind; but in the long period of inactivity which ensued after Claudius ordered withdrawal of the army from lower Germany, time had hung so heavily upon the impetuous youth that he accepted with eagerness the privilege of carrying important dispatches to the Emperor, although warned by the General that his stay in Rome might not include a single night's stop-over.

"But in that matter the gods have been good," he said in concluding his brief explanation. "I arrived at the palace as Cæsar was leaving for the sacrifice, and he sent word by Narcissus for me to report at the third hour on the second day. So come, let us pour a libation to every god in the calendar: I have a thousand questions to ask. Where is Lucius? And how is Octavia, and—and—"

"'And—and' is well and blooming," drawled Marcus mockingly. "At present she is with Octavia at the villa of Aulus. But I must hasten to the palace to post the night-watch. Lucius is prætor, and still busy over the Games, but will be free about the second watch, when I have engaged to join him. Go thou to the Camp with Pollio and later meet me at the house of Silanus on the

Esquiline. Jupiter! I am glad to see thee looking so well—the army hath done wonders, and she will be hard to please who doth not approve”; and as the young man reddened with pleasure, the tribune hurried away, while Junius and the prætorian fought their way through the press in the direction of the Curia to take a short cut up the hill.

In the absence of his brothers, Marcus Junius (whom Caligula called the “Golden Sheep” because of the sweetness of his temper) being pro-consul in Asia, and Torquatus at Baiæ for the winter months, Lucius was living alone in the splendid house of the Silani near the Porta Esquilina. Long before Marcus appeared Junius had burst in upon his surprised and delighted friend and the tribune found them eagerly exchanging confidences in a cosy little triclinium, aglow with the mellow light of the hanging lamps, with a dust-covered amphora on the table beside which they reclined in front of a fire-grate piled with incandescent charcoal.

“We had begun to doubt thy coming,” said Lucius, filling a wine cup for the tribune, who chilled and wearied tossed it off at a gulp and then luxuriously stretched himself on a couch in the grateful warmth from the brazier.

“I am late because of a journey to the villa of Pomponia,” he said with a sly glance at Junius, whose face flushed as he sat erect and cried eagerly, “You saw her?”

“Of course I saw her,” Marcus answered, “and both she and the General bade me invite the prætor and thee for *cena* at the ninth hour on the morrow: they are lonesome—Cæsar’s daughter and the little lady having left for a few days visit at Cumæ.”

With a wrathful gesture Varus poured out and drank in quick succession two brimming cups from the amphora, then threw himself despairingly on the couch. “*Certe* the Fates are against me,” he said with a groan. “When did they leave, Marcus?”

"Why, they started rather unexpectedly," replied the tribune with a wink at the amused Lucius: "of truth as soon as the horses could be harnessed after I dropped word thou wert in Rome!"

For an instant Junius glared at his tormentor; then jumping to his feet and grasping the amphora by the neck, he shouted:

"Thou scoundrel, by Mars the Avenger I am minded to brain thee for thy villainous jokes, and withhold only if thou answer truthfully; didst tell Pythias I am here, and if so, what message did she send?"

"Have a care—have a care," replied the grinning tribune, "thou art spilling nectar that must have been sealed in the consulship of the prætor's grandfather, one drop of which is more precious than all the blood thou hast summoned to thy head. Compose thyself, and I'll tell the truth. As I mentioned thy presence in Rome, she went red and white, and smothered Pomponia with caresses when she heard the invitation for tomorrow—then danced about the room in a way to make the Graces green with envy!"

"Now Jupiter hear me," breathed Junius in an ecstasy; "the year in that dreary German forest hath been spent to good purpose! I vow a hecatomb to the *Bona Dea*"—and he quaffed another cup of the Setinian, after spilling a generous libation to the goddess.

Far into the night the three friends conversed. Only vague rumors as to the occurrences connected with the Augusta's death had reached the camp on the Rhine, while nothing of what had since transpired was known to Varus. He listened with absorbing interest to the tribune's graphic story of the last two days of the Vintage Festival. Then Lucius told of the contest between the freedmen for the privilege of selecting another consort for the Emperor, which had ensued notwithstanding Claudius declared with tears in his eyes that never again would he undergo the tortures of married life. Narcissus,

who rendered such signal services in the affair of Silius, advocated Cæsar's remarriage with his second wife, Ælia Petina, whom he had divorced to marry Messalina; Callistus favored Lolliã Paulina, an imperious woman of immense wealth who for a brief period had been Caligula's wife, while Pallas proposed Agrippina, upon whose beauty, intelligence and high birth he declaimed with alluring eloquence. "The struggle for supremacy hath been very keen," said Lucius in conclusion, "and Rome is agog with curiosity as to the outcome, which remains uncertain."

"'Tis thought Pallas stands to win," observed Marcus, "if only because of Cæsar's fear, which doubtless the Treasurer hath both excited and studiously kept alive, that otherwise the daughter of Germanicus might marry some ambitious man of standing and influence and another conspiracy result. 'Tis true, there is a legal obstacle in that she is the Emperor's niece, but the Senate can remedy that."

"And what of thine own fortunes in all this?" said Varus to the prætor.

"I know not," gravely replied the young patrician; "I do not stand well with Agrippina, and of late Cæsar appears to have grown cold, if not actually suspicious. A few days since, when under Pomponia's advice Aulus broached the question of an early marriage, the Emperor answered curtly that Octavia is yet too young. I fear some influence is exerted secretly against me."

"It would not be strange when Cæsar listens to freed slaves rather than the Quirites," said Varus gloomily, "and in whatsoever happens methinks my fate is linked with thine."

"Come," interposed Marcus cheerfully, "Aulus and Pomponia have great weight with Cæsar and both are well disposed. Besides, Narcissus is a wily adversary, and if he succeeds, with Antonia's mother in the palace Cæsar's children would have nothing to fear. But the

drowsy god beckons, and I am due on the Palatine at sunrise. Sleepest thou at the Camp, Junius?"

"I said so when I left, but told the prefect not to sit up for me," he answered facetiously, "and if thou canst offer a soldier's bed, Lucius—"

"I would not permit thee to go," interrupted the other. "Everything is prepared, but since the slaves were dismissed that we might have privacy, myself must play *cubicularius*"; and lighting candles he led the way to the sleeping apartments in one of the wings.

After the death of her mother, Octavia spent much of her time at Pomponia Græcina's. Aulus urged her to make an extended visit, to which he had gained the Emperor's consent, but she would not continuously absent herself from Britannicus. In sharing his childish pleasures and keeping pace with his studies, the sorrowing girl found a real solace, and her brother's well-being and happiness became one of the absorbing passions of her life. Almost daily, however, she went to the villa, its secluded charm and peaceful simplicity soothing her troubled spirit, while the serene, transparent goodness of its noble mistress and the stern, unbending virtue of the grizzled veteran never failed measurably to arouse the high incentive and inspire somewhat of the courage of which she felt such dire need.

She had gone there with Pythias the day Varus arrived, expecting to return the following morning, but was easily persuaded to stay another night, Marcus gladly promising to spend some hours with Britannicus; indeed, although manifested with more reserve, her emotions at the coming of the young man were no less joyful than those openly displayed by Pythias. And now in the bright sunshine of the early afternoon they were awaiting the return of Aulus, who had driven to the Porta Capena to meet his guests.

When at last the carriage emerged from the woods Pythias ran back for a last inspection of herself in a polished steel mirror which hung on the wall. "Truly I

look like a fish-woman," she panted, nervously dabbing at the thick coils of her high-piled hair.

"Why not let it fall free on thy shoulders, as do the barbarian women in the Rhine forests," said Octavia mirthfully. "I doubt not Junius hath learned to prefer it that way."

"If I thought ever he had looked twice at one," cried Pythias with flashing eyes, "I'd—but there they are! Oh, come quickly, Octavia," and they hurried out into the *ostium*.

"Behold the goddesses of the Campagna!" cried Aulus as hand in hand the blushing girls came down the steps, "and 'tis a toss-up which merits the apple! But since mine own is more beautiful than either"—taking Pomponia by the hand—"and Marcus is too shrewd to involve himself, why let these others settle the question as may be, then follow us to the triclinium"; and considerately turning his back, he led the way into the house.

The simple meal passed cheerfully. Varus was monopolized by the General, who questioned him about the dispositions of Corbulo in the campaign. The young soldier answered so resolutely and intelligently that Aulus regarded him with growing favor, observing finally in a tone which brought a flush to the centurion's brow, "'Tis plain Corbulo is a reader of men as well as a skillful strategist."

Pleased at the honor accorded her lover, Pythias entered gaily into the conversation between Pomponia and Marcus. The latter's guileless nature and artlessness had won the confidence and esteem of the matron, for whom in turn the tribune cherished an admiration and respect akin to reverence. To confuse and embarrass him in Pomponia's presence, the mischief-loving Pythias never lost an opportunity.

"'Tis a matter of gossip thou hast been making eyes at the fair young wife of Crispinus," she said demurely.

“No doubt Poppæa herself will make thee suffer abundantly: but hast no shame before the Lady Pomponia because of such conduct?”

“’Tis not true,” he averred hotly; “I did but escort her home after the pole of the *lectica* broke and the rabble had become annoying—surely thou dost not accredit her?” with an appealing glance at Pomponia.

“Fie on thee, Pythias!” said the matron reprovingly. “Have no care, Marcus—the child is light-headed with joy over the coming of her beloved, and hath lost her poise.”

The young girl flushed rosily and bending over the tribune gave him both hands as she cried penitently:

“Thou splendid big booby; there is no woman in Rome worthy of thee. I would rather be thy slave girl than the *amata* of almost any of the others!”

“Alas, poor Junius! Either he should stay and guard his treasure even from his trusted friends, or cast his lot with some flowing-haired barbarian,” said Octavia gaily. A faint color tinged her cheeks, and her eyes were alight with the reflected radiance of the fires kindled by the first unreserved surrender to her beloved of a maiden’s heart and soul.

Pythias flashed a glance across the table, and the ready retort which trembled on her lips remained unspoken. As she stared intently Octavia dropped her eyes in confusion, whereupon the other cried triumphantly:

“Did I not tell thee in the garden that ‘the perfect joy’ awaited only thine own acceptance? Oh, I am suffocating in this dark pit—can we not go out into the sunshine?”—appealing to Pomponia, upon whose smiling assent the excited young girl flew to Octavia and they vanished precipitately.

“Now, Minerva, hear me,” cried the amazed Aulus, “what driveth the mad creature?”

Pomponia laid a finger on his lips, then smiling said

quietly, "When the wine loseth its appeal, thou and Marcus will find us on the terrace—come Silanus, and thou also," to Junius, who rose with alacrity, and after saluting the General passed out with the others.

"By the Great Mother of the gods, never can I understand women," said Aulus, helplessly. "But always she hath good reason, Marcus, and we were wise to fall in line—although the amphora hath just been broached"—regretfully.

"Mayhap now thou wilt understand that 'tis Venus—not Mars, at whose altar they came to sacrifice," said Pomponia, who was awaiting them at the doorway. "How couldst thou hold him so long in chains with thy endless talk of combats and manœuvres?" and she glanced meaningly toward the terrace where Pythias, assisted by the centurion, was joyously distributing corn to the swarming pigeons, while Lucius and Octavia were halfway down the slope.

Aulus laughed, as he rejoined, "The scales have fallen from mine eyes. In truth 'twas vanity alone that blinded me, *amata*; and I thought the young scamp was pleased at a chance to learn from the old fighter! Well, Marcus, let us make amends by going back to the Cæcuban, that they may complete their sacrifices unobserved."

"'Tis not for me, General," replied the tribune, "I am due at the palace at setting of the sun, which is but an hour high."

"Why didst not make all plain to me, Pomponia?" said Aulus, with a show of irritation; "then might I have craved for the tribune Cæsar's indulgence until the morrow. And must these others go with thee, Marcus?"

The tribune laughed. "I doubt not they have planned to tarry so long as thy good nature endures."

"Why, that is better," said the General with clearing brow, "and yields for me the occasion to compensate for my blunders—emulating the great Cæsar, who not only never lost a battle but never failed to retrieve a victory

from the blunders of a lieutenant. Hola! Junius, come hither with that flaunting jade. This recreant tribune is departing and craves company: go thou with him as far as the Appia, or until the carriage overtakes, and Pythias will lead thee home by a wood path she knows. Say to the prætor the sunset is fine from the field behind the house, and there is a quiet bench by the ilexes. Meanwhile, if my own beautiful goddess will beguile me while I drain the amphora, each may be happy with the one he loveth best!"

"*Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia,*" said Pomponia fondly taking his hand. "Bid Chloe bring thee a *palla*, child, and take one to Octavia—already the air cools—and do not tarry too late."

In rapturous delight the young girl sped on her mission, while Marcus took his leave. "Never can I find words to tell thee of my gratitude, gracious lady," he said earnestly, bending over Pomponia's hand; "the gods have no richer gift for me than the happiness I find here," and as if fearing her answer, with a military salute to the General, he started down the slope.

On the little bench below the wood, in the golden haze which embathed them like a glorious benediction from the setting sun enthroned on Vaticanus, the young patrician and the pure and lovely daughter of the Cæsars were rapturously spinning the solitary thread of earthly joy accorded by their hapless destiny. In that hour of whispered converse in Pomponia's house, Octavia's childhood had dropped away forever. The betrothal, coldly assigned from considerations of family at a time when Silanus was a mere boy and she a prattling babe, of course in itself had carried no meaning to them. Indeed under the Roman law and customs the *sponsalia* was not binding if either desired to retract. But during the period of intimacy permissible by reason of her tender years and their consanguinity, the gallant, high-minded youth became enthralled by the charm of the winsome child, whose

lovely character and transparent purity in the end aroused his youthful love and devotion. And as time passed Octavia's own heart had been stirred by her cousin's engaging qualities and lofty ideals; so that for the time being restrained by maiden modesty, she awaited only assurance that she was wanted for herself alone before surrendering to her awakened passion.

She could not have explained how that assurance at last had come. She knew only that in the instant when her hand, momentarily dropping to the couch on which he reclined at her side, had been covertly taken and pressed by his own with a fervor which his dark eyes interpreted, the swift thought that he loved her for her own sake had contracted her heart with painful ecstasy. In the delicious turmoil of the conviction, and under the reaction from all the sorrow and misery which had overtaken her, she had been swept away by the surge of an emotion to which she yielded with all the intensity of an essentially impassioned endowment suddenly freed from self-imposed restraint.

In this hour of bestowal Silanus discovered she was anything but unresponsive. She accepted his ardent advances with the pent-up fervor of a nature surprised into sudden disclosure of its dormant and unsuspected fires. The serene composure and womanly reserve of her namesake, the noble and virtuous sister of Augustus, which in the development of Octavia's character atavistically had become its predominant characteristic, momentarily took flight at the awakening of other latent impulses inherited from the more ungoverned among her progenitors—the impetuous lover of Cleopatra, the fiery Drusi and Claudii, and the Barbatii, who had contributed a second current of the turbulent Antony blood.

Silanus felt her clinging arms, her throbbing breast, the tremulous lips which pressed his own at first in questioning wonder, then with answering fire. In the deep blue

eyes which met his search with fearless unreserve he read the glorified admission of complete surrender—under his eager compulsion again and again confirmed by the sweetly whispered admission of her love.

At last exhausted by the tumult of her emotions, she had crept close and laid her head upon his breast, murmuring the beautiful Roman formula symbolical of that perfect union which is the crowning act of maidenhood. Out of the storm and tempest of the angry, wind-swept seas, she had sailed into her harbor, and had cast her anchor behind the sheltering headlands of abiding love. In the ecstasy of consummate happiness life had no horizon—time blended with eternity, whose bounds were the illimitable Present, which had neither beginning nor end.

It had been one of those delightful Roman winter days in which every object is softened and beautified by the atmosphere and every breath of air invigorates the body and exhilarates the soul. Even when the declining sun began to lose its warmth and splendor, the serene loveliness of the evening hour yielded in abundance its compensatory appeal.

Slowly the lengthening shadows crept up the gentle slope. Golden spears of sunlight thrust far among the purple hollows. The Alban peaks grew soft and dim in their rose-tinted shrouds. Like a slow-rising curtain of gauze the tenuous mist of evening obscured the vision, until at last the conquering insistence of faintly glimmering stars proclaimed the twilight's arrival—then darkness fell.

Throughout the wondrous transformation, under the subtle influence of its sensuous beauty, the lovers dreamed their dream. They floated out upon the golden sea of hope, whose every wave was charmed; they soared up into the cloudlands of fancy, where rosy signals beckoned; they drifted lazily about in the twilight places of quietude and peace—then, as the last fold of the night-mantle

enveloped them, through the simple act of clinging more closely, found their ultimate beatitude at the point from which they had set out—in the sentient joy of possession.

As Lucius finally started to speak, Octavia gently disengaged herself, and with both hands on the dark head which inclined towards her, whispered jubilantly, “My heart hath such fullness of joy it were only pain to harbor more. Nay”—as with pleading eyes he essayed to speak—“let us depart ere anything untoward shall break the spell, or mischance of foreboding or dread dim the glory of what hath come to us. Oh! it is as if life never could harbor another care or sorrow!”

Lucius started guiltily. Of a truth the gods had forewarned her! In another moment he would have spoken of the fruitless mission of Aulus to the Emperor in their behalf and of Cæsar’s recent coldness to himself. He had considered that both as matter of right and of precaution she should know the truth. Convinced that some sinister and powerful influence was being exerted against their marriage, he believed that Cæsar’s favor might be regained only through a personal appeal by Octavia. Moreover, instinctively he felt that not an hour should be lost in making the attempt; and had purposed suggesting that in company with Pomponia, for whom Claudius cherished something as near respect as it was possible for him to entertain for anyone, Octavia should make her plea on the morrow.

But now she had sealed his lips. After the artless disclosure of her desire that this hour of “perfect joy” should be unclouded by anxiety or doubt, he could not bring himself to utter a word which might cast the lightest shadow upon her unalloyed happiness; and in swift and generous submission, laughing gaily, he caught her to his breast.

“For me there is nothing can break the spell, beloved one, nor foreboding, nor menace, nor death itself put out the fire thou hast kindled or dispel the glory thou hast

awakened in my heart," he whispered earnestly. "But rightfully the hour belongeth to thee, and since 'tis thy wish, let us depart. Tell me but once again, *amata*"—and for a fleeting moment the souls of the lovers fused in a last ardent embrace, while the radiant star of evening which had trailed the setting sun, its vigil now performed dropped smilingly behind the western barrier.

DESPAIR

IF MESSALINA had been willing to subordinate her willful desires to the dictates of prudence, as urged by her consort on the morning after the marriage ceremony, possibly their enterprise, mad as it was, would not have resulted so disastrously. The prefect Rufius always had been a partisan of the Augusta, and with his assistance prompt action by Silius might have won over the all-powerful prætorians. Such an accomplishment would have negatived Cæsar's visit to the Camp with its tragic outcome, on the day following the Bacchanalia.

Similar reflections occur in regard to Octavia and Lucius. Octavia was neither selfish nor cowardly, and if Lucius had acted upon his convictions on the memorable evening at the villa, the impending tragedy might have been averted. Claudius was easily influenced and cherished a genuine affection for his daughter, whose appeal in her own behalf not improbably would have triumphed over the malignant whispers of Agrippina's instruments.

Of course, the indiscretions which invited disaster proceeded from widely dissimilar motives on the part of the principals in the respective episodes. Messalina's selfishness and inordinate love of pleasure, coupled with her co-partner's lack of determination, was responsible for the fatal delay in their case; in the other it proceeded neither from selfishness nor indolence but was occasioned alone by the generous self-abnegation of Silanus in his tender solicitude for Octavia and the innocent desires which she confessed so artlessly.

Unhappily the law of events is sternly unconcerned

with what may have actuated those who create the causes. It is the fact of unpreparedness, not the engendering motive, which invites the penalty. And by his manly, but misguided decision—in impulsive compliance with her naïve request—not to obtrude his anxieties upon their fleeting happiness, Silanus unconsciously deprived the unfortunate Octavia of her only chance of obtaining earthly happiness, and incidentally sealed his own fate.

On the evening when Lucius was entertaining Junius and the tribune at his ancestral home on the Esquiline, in her secluded little house scarcely a stone's throw distant Agrippina and her henchman Pallas were holding a momentous interview—which resulted in the disgrace and death of Silanus and to the hapless Octavia brought the night of everlasting despair.

The hour for which the inexorable daughter of Germanicus had labored so sedulously and waited so patiently was about to strike. Steadfastly, but with infinite caution, she had prosecuted her design to make her son Domitius Emperor, and from the moment of her return from the shameful banishment imposed by Caligula down to this day when Claudius at last declared his readiness to marry her when the legal obstacle should be removed, she had not taken a false step. Narcissus and Callistus now frankly conceded their defeat, their respective candidates for Messalina's place retiring from the contest; while Vitellius, who as Censor was in a position to render invaluable services, foreseeing Agrippina's success, had hastened to ingratiate himself by entering freely into her plans. His commanding influence with the magistrates was sufficient assurance that a decree legalizing marriage with a niece, then and always theretofore prohibited by Roman law, would be readily procurable from the obsequious Senate when shortly it should convene.

Singularly free from personal vanity, she was not in quest of power for the mere sake of its possession. And the thought of marriage with her debased and imbecile

uncle must have been intensely repugnant to the versatile and brilliant woman whose beauty, wealth and high birth made it possible for her to select a consort from the eligible list of the entire Roman world. But unlike Messalina, who invariably had been driven by her passions and unrestrained desires, Agrippina sternly ruled her inclinations, acting alone from those rooted in self-interest—which latter for her meant the interest of her son. The elevation of Domitius to the purple had become his mother's consuming ambition; and as an indispensable aid to its realization—if only to prevent a rival from diverting the imperial favor in the direction of another candidate—it was necessary for her to enter the palace and command the ear of the ruler who, as Tacitus quaintly observes, "had neither preference nor aversion except such as were infused or directed by others."

Now that the marriage was assured, she regarded Messalina's children and Octavia's affianced as the most serious obstacles to the accomplishment of her project. For the time being Britannicus gave her slight concern: since the affair in the Circus, Domitius had entirely supplanted him in the imagination and favor of the populace and the guard. Besides, he was barely eight years old, and before he would become troublesome the Fates—or if necessary something else—might be relied on to interpose. As matters stood, Octavia and her betrothed constituted the real menace. Cæsar's daughter was highly regarded by the soldiery, idolized by the people and cherished by her father; and following the betrothal, Claudius had conferred signal honors upon Silanus, even presenting him with the triumphal ornaments after the campaign in Britain. The young man had acquitted himself with notable dignity and success in the high offices to which he had been advanced; although not yet twenty-one, he had nearly completed his term as prætor (the statutory age for which was thirty), following which he would succeed to a pro-consulship in one of

the senatorial provinces. Moreover Silanus and Domitius stood in the same degree of relationship to the first Emperor; their respective grandmothers were sisters, children of Agrippa and Julia, the daughter of Augustus. Thus in respect of birth they possessed equal claims to the succession.

From all these considerations, to the penetrating vision of Agrippina it was clear that never could she be sure of success until Silanus was out of the way. "With this accomplished—and it must be done at once"—as she declared with cold insistence to Pallas—"Cæsar easily may be induced to betroth Octavia to Domitius, whose adoption into the Claudian family can as readily be brought about. And after marriage with Octavia, when the moment arrives, any difficulty in preferring him to Britannicus would be materially lessened."

"Thy reasoning is flawless, as customarily," said the Greek in smiling acquiescence. "But would it not be preferable to delay until thou art established in the palace? Silanus is popular and hath staunch friends among the prætorians and nobles. Thy marriage is the first necessity; until it hath been consummated, is it wise to risk a mischance from overhasty action in this other affair, which momentarily is of lesser importance? In matters of indifference we may trust to fortune; in those of moment we should rely upon prudence."

"Admirably hast thou expressed my reason for quick action," Agrippina rejoined gravely. "I would the removal of Silanus shall be effected before I become Cæsar's wife in order that none—particularly Octavia—may charge me with its procurement. Moreover, the ultimate success of what I have projected depends upon its undertaking before his term as prætor expires—on the third day from now. Thus 'tis the higher prudence to strike quickly—which, indeed, will not be in such haste as might seem, since already to an extent I have prepared Cæsar's mind."

Pallas nodded intelligently; "Doubtless thou art right; and has everything been planned?"

"Down to the last *vale*," she answered confidently, "subject to thine approval and the acquiescence of Vitellius."

"Of the latter there is no doubt," Pallas rejoined: "he will balk at nothing—even the sacrifice of his son's wife Junia, which at thy bidding I have ascertained and now assure thee, although I know not its significance."

"'Tis to explain that I have called thee," she answered, and speaking low and rapidly in a few words unfolded her plan.

Pallas listened greedily, his eyes lighting with evil admiration as he cried in eager praise:

"*Perpol*, thou art a genius; 'tis like a scene from Æschylus—and withal so simple and sure. Thyself will instruct Vitellius?"

"Myself only; thou wilt send him tomorrow night at this hour. In thy converse with him have a care thou knowest nothing about this. Then there is slight chance ever he will pit his unsupported word against mine in an attempt to escape responsibility. Thus it will be considered the act of Vitellius, the Censor, alone—as must be, for complete success. Fail not then, for tomorrow night; in the meantime I will see Cæsar for a last word of preparation and on the next day the blow shall fall"; and she dismissed him with a complacent smile.

In the late afternoon of the day following Pomponia's dinner party, Marcus alighted from a litter which had drawn up at the house of Silanus. Ushered into the library he found the youthful prætor assiduously engaged upon an official report of his administration, which would end on the morrow. Lucius greeted him warmly, dismissing his secretary, whom he bade summon a slave that he might order refreshments.

"Not on my account, Silanus," the tribune interposed;

"I must return on the instant, having come merely to deliver this missive from the Lady Octavia," from the folds of his tunic withdrawing the dainty *tabellæ*, which Lucius accepted with avidity and at once started to untie.

Marcus checked him with a quick gesture, observing with a smile, "She commanded thou shalt not open it until after my departure—nor venture a reply before the morning, when thy judgment shall have been sobered by sleep; although from her diffident bearing and thy eager apprehension, I doubt that, after reading, thou wilt close an eye tonight! But hearken my friend," his expression becoming serious, "I fear evil is brooding. Vitellius was at the palace early this morning—he went in to Cæsar as Junius was leaving with the dispatches. Callistus was sent for in a hurry and rumor is that Claudius was in a fine rage. Afterwards as the Censor was walking down the passage with Pallas, the tribune Decius overheard thy name mentioned in a contemptuous way; and in truth, although without definite reason, I confess alarm."

Lucius laughed carelessly: "Believe me, 'tis nothing, Marcus. Vitellius is angered because two days since, whilst approaching my sister Junia's house, one of the Censor's *apparitores* who was slow in giving way was pushed aside by my lictor."

The tribune shook his head: "There must have been other consideration or prompting than such a trifle to move Vitellius," he doubted gravely. "Thyself didst tell us of Cæsar's recent coldness and thy concern."

"But I was depressed at the moment—since when something hath happened," the other cried jubilantly, gaily waving the *tabellæ*. "Decius himself hath sent word to expect him here early in the first watch; perchance he will have more to tell. As for that other matter, somehow my fear hath taken wings. At any rate the Fates will have their way."

"'Tis well not to play into their hands," his friend

rejoined. "Old Seneca writes that while Fate never drives a man to commit a crime, it may well impel him to commit an indiscretion. If thou hast aroused the anger of such as the scoundrelly Censor, 'tis an indiscretion not to take speedy precautions." But entirely preoccupied with thoughts of the precious missive which he was burning to read, Lucius only smiled perfunctorily; and with another shake of his head Marcus withdrew.

Scarcely had he passed through the doorway before Silanus had cut the string and was absorbed in his first love-letter.

OCTAVIA to LUCIUS

All through the night I could but think—and dream—of thee. And now at earliest dawn have I come again to our little altar beneath the ilexes, where in our so-great happiness we watched the sun go down—to see it rise again in even greater promise! Thou art beside me, beloved of my heart; and as yesterday thou wert, today, tomorrow and alway thou art and shalt be my life and dearest joy—even, as 'tis my earnest wish, forever shall I be thine. Farewell.

"We two!" How sweet the words, how full
Of tender meaning that no heart can know
But ours. Swiftly the moments—
Gone, it would seem almost ere yet they come—
When thou and I together are—O happy hour!

"We two!" the whispered words that must not fall
On other ear than thine, or mine. No other lip
May trespass on that sweet domain of sound.

"We two!" O, loving words that to us breathe
One purpose and one wish—forever true!

"We two—we two"—*together*—Thou and I!
Adown the wave of Time as on we glide
And life and hope and friends are doubly ours—
How bright the changing shores when Thou and I
Together are—"we two!"

In the dull glow of the brazier the young man reclined in blissful exaltation. She loved him—the pure and lovely young girl! At last she had accepted him, not at the mere behest of paternal authority—the *patria potestas*, which alone had occasioned the betrothal—but of her own free will and maiden choice. And now, in her youthful innocence and ingenuousness, she had bared her heart in glad and unsolicited confession! In the transparent beauty of her mind and soul he had felt abashed at his own unworthiness. But he would strive to become more deserving, and at least was sure that in turn he loved her for herself alone. And he knew they would be happy. In another day his task would be finished. With Aulus and Pomponia to countenance her appeal and exert their influence, Octavia would go to Cæsar—and the Emperor would relent. And then she would promise before the Pontifex and Flamen! He would obtain a few months' leave before assuming the pro-consulship, and they would go to Baiæ—no, there it would be too frivolous and noisy: rather they would choose a little villa at quiet Cumæ—and climb the mountain, and explore the groves where Herophilé, the inspired prophetess, once lived and preserved the Sibylline Books, to the guardianship of which, as ex-prætor, he would be eligible, and aspired—and watch the clouds and moon—and float on the quiet waters among the shadows, as in fancy they had floated that beautiful evening at “their little altar!” And in rapturous exaltation he lay back among the pillows, pressing the *tabellæ* to his breast as he murmured passionately, “O my beautiful one—I love thee, I love thee!”

The hours slid past unnoticed. Night had fallen and the room was shrouded in darkness. A slave entered, as Lucius supposed to light the lamps, and he commanded, “Wait until I summon thee; yet would I rest awhile.”

“I crave pardon, but thou art inquired for, noble Silanus,” was the reply.

"Who is it?" said the prætor with an accent of annoyance.

With a slight hesitation the slave answered, "I know not—but was bidden to announce, one thou wert expecting."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten—'tis Decius," Silanus ejaculated, raising himself. "Light the candelabrum quickly and conduct him hither; then send a boy to fill the brazier and direct Larcius to bring an amphora of the wine my father sent from Spain when he was Governor there: 'tis fiery, as Decius preferreth—and *perpol!* We will pour a libation both to Venus and Juno Pronuba!"—with a satisfied laugh.

He had just completed fastening the precious letter to the breast-folds of his inner tunica when, at the sound of a footfall, turning quickly instead of the expected tribune he saw with amazement the tall figure of an advancing stranger, with three shadowy forms grouped in the background, beyond the doorway. The next instant, with a quickening of the pulse he recognized the official messenger of Vitellius the Censor—the same who had been jostled by his lictor, as he had related to Marcus.

The viator neither afforded him opportunity to speak nor lost time in formalities—announcing in an even, colorless voice:

"I bear a message from Lucius Vitellius, the Censor, to Lucius Silanus, the ex-prætor, who hath been accused of immoral acts, more particularly a criminal intercourse with his sister, Junia Calvina, the Censor's daughter-in-law. For so great and notorious infamy, thou hast been expelled from the Senate and degraded from thy office. I hand thee a copy of the edict"—extending a roll of papyrus, tied with a purple cord, from which dangled an imposing seal.

The face of Silanus went white, his features distorted, and for an instant, with wildly dilated eyes, he stared as if unseeing: then the blood rushed back with such swiftness that he staggered as if from a heavy blow, until under

a mighty effort recovering himself, with an inarticulate cry of rage he launched himself at the unprepared viator, who jumping backwards, tripped over a tiger-skin and went sprawling. As the man fell the figures beyond the doorway detached themselves from the shadows, and entered the room in the person of a centurion and two prætorians.

In a flash the young prætor recovered his self-control. "I crave thy pardon," he said, with cold pretense of civility to the angry and crestfallen official, who had scrambled to his feet: "'twas a careless and inhospitable movement of mine—but 'tis passing strange always thou seemest to be in my way." Then to the centurion he said easily, "What are thy orders, Vatinius?"

With manifest embarrassment the young officer answered regretfully, "'Tis for the viator to declare."

"Then before he speaks further I shall appeal to Cæsar," said Lucius firmly. "Take me to the palace at once, under guard; I put myself in thy hands."

"Thine appeal already hath been considered," said the viator malevolently. "From the scroll thou wilt learn that Cæsar hath approved the Censor's edict, hath ordered renunciation of thine office, for the unexpired term of which Marcellus hath been appointed, hath annulled thy betrothal to the Lady Octavia, and now commands thine immediate withdrawal, under guard, to such place in Campania as hath been appointed—there to await the Emperor's further commands"; and throwing on the floor the roll which Silanus had refused to accept, he said harshly to the centurion, "Execute thy orders," and scornfully left the room.

Silanus hesitated. Not for one instant did he blind himself to the fatal significance of what had occurred. He was aware that since the first Emperor the authority of the Censor to regulate morals, theretofore supreme, had been taken over by Cæsar. Except in the matter of the census, the power of the Censor to exercise the traditional

authority of his office had become only nominal. Although still it was his duty to supervise conduct and morals, and his privilege to prefer charges, determine the guilt and affix the censorial stigma by way of punishment, in all important affairs of the sort really it was Cæsar who decided. Accordingly, Silanus knew that in the present case Vitellius would not have dared promulgate the edict unless approved in advance by Claudius. Although in doubt as to its source and motive, the plot against him was manifest; and he knew that he was lost. But with every drop of his blood at boiling point, the fighting spirit of his race spurred on the mad impulsion to resist—as a dozen years later it drove his gallant nephew (with the exception of his murderer the last male descendant of Augustus) to refuse the privilege of voluntary death and die fighting Nero's assassins with naked hands.

But there was Octavia. To die now would prevent denial of the infamous charge—of which thereafter the power of the villainous Censor even might extort a false admission from his unfortunate sister, who was so vulnerable because of her general misconduct. It was in a brotherly effort to restrain her that his frequent and unguarded visits to her house had been made—now so abominably and with such shameless wickedness distorted as to their motive, in order to degrade and destroy him. No, he could not suffer that frightful accusation to pass unchallenged—it would kill Octavia. Surely the gods at least would vouchsafe him a chance to be heard—and in a moment his resolution was made.

“Come,” he said to the centurion with unshaken voice and a proud uplift of the head, “I am ready; suffer but that my slave shall fetch a cloak. And there comes the Lydian with the amphora. The night will be cold, Vatinus; let us fortify ourselves with a draught of noble wine. ‘Tis fit that from the cherished store of my honored father, to whom came death in this same foul way, his son should drink farewell to Rome—and to Cæsar! Fetch

two more cups, Larcus"; and turning to the prætorians, with his engaging smile, he said graciously, "Thou shalt join us."

Preceded by a lantern bearer and escorted by a formidable guard, marching in front and behind, in sombre silence the closed litter swung down the hill, around the Capitoline, past the huge structure of the Circus, looming in grim majesty, and on to the Appia, beyond the city gate—where the watchword given was that which Claudius was forever assigning to the soldiers, "In one's first anger to ward off the foe!"—borrowed both from the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*.

Silanus heard it with a sigh and wondered whether in submitting without a blow he had made a mistake. He thought of his father, put to death by Claudius at the instigation of the Augusta; of his grandfather, Lucius Paulus, who also succumbed to the imperial wrath; of his grandmother Julia, who passed away in exile and disgrace; of her mother, the daughter of Augustus, who perished of starvation at the hands of Tiberius. Indeed, of all his ill-starred race at the moment he could recall only Augustus and the noble Agrippa who had died honorably. During five generations death and disgrace at the hands of Cæsar had been the heritage of his house. And now, his own life hanging by a thread, his sister Junia forever disgraced, his other sister under suspicion and her life embittered as the former wife of Messalina's bigamous husband—what reason to hope that the same sinister fate would not overtake his two brothers and youthful nephew—the last of their race? "I had no right to cherish hope; and now of a truth the gods have turned their faces," he muttered dejectedly. "*Explicitus est liber*—the book is unrolled."

Directly they were approaching the grove which abutted on the Via where the shaded lane led away to Pomponia's villa. A pale, watery moon had stolen out, reflecting a ghostly light. Through a rift in the curtains Silanus

looked over in the direction of the ilexes—where Octavia had erected and consecrated her altar of love. Was it in truth only yesterday they had worshipped there together? His thoughts flew back to the Palatine, where, mercifully ignorant of what had befallen, even at that moment he doubted not she was thinking or dreaming of him and of their new-found happiness. And with a muffled cry of anguish and despair—not the outcome of fear, but constituting the last tribute of ingenuous sorrow at the death of Hope—Silanus flung himself back upon the cushions and apathetically yielded to his fate.

PATRIA POTESTAS

MARCUS was appalled by the disaster which had overtaken Silanus. In a hurried discussion with the tribune Decius it became manifest that a false message from the latter had been used to detain the prætor at his house to enable spiriting him away under cover of the night.

Decius was furious at having been made to appear a party in the plot. "By Mars the Avenger," he exclaimed hotly, "if there is a blow to be struck or other service for Silanus called for, albeit with death as the price, thou hast but to speak, and whether thou speakest or not I will get even with the scoundrelly Censor!"

"Methinks to strike the real culprit thy dagger would be lifted higher than at Vitellius," said Marcus bitterly, as he hurried away.

The news spread rapidly, and after taking every precaution that it should not leak through to Octavia during his absence, Marcus made a flying journey to the villa, returning almost as speedily with Aulus and his wife.

The Emperor was obdurate. He refused to see either Pomponia or his daughter—declaring to Aulus that for some time past he had been suspicious of Silanus, whose offenses at last had been established beyond a doubt. And when he announced that already he had ordered the banishment of Calvina, and to her sentence had added an injunction to the pontiffs "that according to the ancient institution of King Tullius they should offer sacrifices at the grove of Diana in expiation of the incest," it became evident the matter was irrevocable.

Of all those friendly to Silanus, Plautius alone dared speak his mind freely to Cæsar. His remonstrances unheeded, the blunt old soldier listened impatiently to the Emperor's platitudes on virtue and fatuous maunderings about the dreadful fate from which Octavia had been spared. But when Claudius went on to praise the fine courage and lofty spirit of Vitellius in sacrificing his own daughter-in-law to the purity and welfare of the State, the irate veteran could restrain himself no longer.

"By all the gods," he shouted angrily, "had I been thine adviser, it were that vile reprobate and his secret abettors—whose names I would have wrung from the dastard in the torture-chamber—who would be on their way to Hades! Whatever may be said of Calvina, all Rome knows that her noble brother is incapable of such infamy as that for which thou hast condemned him unheard. At the instigation of this foul craven, who himself was the sponsor of Messalina in her crimes against thee, foolishly thou hast pulled down one of thy strongest props, and under pretense of affection for thy daughter hast struck her a cruel blow. Have a care lest thyself some day shall fall under a stroke by the same traitorous hand!"

Cæsar's eyes dilated with fear as he cowered before the wrathful vehemence and resolute bearing of the old Triumphator, who stood so high in the regard of the army and the populace that even the brutal tyrant who succeeded to the purple, in his announced determination to "extirpate virtue itself," never dared molest him. Angry and disgusted, Aulus turned his back on the palace, after sending word to Pomponia that the situation was hopeless.

It was the day on which Octavia was expecting the answer from Lucius. Since the dispatch of her own letter the previous afternoon she had revelled in the delicious anticipation of his reply—the thought of which had occu-

pied every waking moment and shaped and colored her dreams.

She had arisen early and after a pretense of breakfasting was sitting alone in the sunny angle of the wall at the back of her little garden, in rapt enjoyment of this new and delightful sensation.

It was to be her first love-letter—as hers had been that of Silanus. She knew it would be loving and tender and beautiful. Oh! if only she had taken more pains with what she had written, which was so poor and inadequate! Those wretched verses, which, of course, he would consider childish and silly: why had she sent them? Indeed, she ought not to have written at all: at best it was unmaidenly, and as such would be disappointing to him. Why, until yesterday never before since early childhood had she even touched his hand or talked with him in private—and a hot flush swept over her as suddenly, and strangely enough for the first time, she became acutely conscious that she had rested in his arms and returned his kisses without a sense of shame.

But he was her betrothed: she loved him and never would love another. She had acted as her heart impelled; and as for the letter, so far as she could find words, had scratched upon the waxed sheets exactly what she felt. That is what he would wish her to do and would love her the more because of it. And thus, alternately, she went hot and cold under the contending impulses of womanly exaltation and virginal modesty.

Informed by Marcus of what had occurred, and that he would return as soon as possible with Pomponia, upon whom they must rely to break the woeful tidings to Octavia, waiting only to regain a semblance of composure Pythias hastened to the garden. Although terribly shaken by the tribune's disclosure, and doubtful of being able to conceal her trepidation, recalling the betrayal of Messalina's indiscretions by the vindictive Eos on a previous

occasion, she resolved not to risk a similar mischance. But while ordinarily Octavia at once would have apprehended the other's manifest anxiety and distress, preoccupied with the compelling thoughts and visions of the hour she was quite unobservant, and after an absent-minded greeting again became absorbed in her reflections, until the unexpected appearance of Pomponia sharply brought her back to realities.

During the interval Pythias had wandered up and down disconsolately, her fears mounting and her self-control steadily diminishing as the moments dragged. When at last the wife of Aulus arrived, she broke down utterly and, after submitting a moment to Pomponia's tender ministrations, ran towards the palace.

Octavia's first emotion of surprise upon the coming of Pomponia at an hour so unusual quickly changed to amazement at the hysterical outburst of Pythias. Then as she missed that smiling serenity which had become the matron's habitual expression and noted instead the sorrowing eyes and lips eloquent with unspoken sadness, the young girl blanched under a sudden access of fear.

"It is something about Lucius," she faltered, in quick premonition.

The pitying woman nodded, and after a few whispered words drew her away, drooping like a broken lily, pathetically silent, the fair young face drawn in dull and hopeless misery.

No one knows what passed between them in that fateful hour in the little *cubiculum* where during the previous night in her dreams and musings Octavia had visioned the fairyland of happiness. But in the piteous expression of the sensitive mouth and the ineffable sadness of her eyes, the anguish she had suffered was painfully apparent to those who knew her intimately; while to the searching eye of the spirit-diviner it would have been discernible that the light had gone out of her soul forever.

And now the daughter of Germanicus was well on her

way to success. As Pallas observed, nothing but the Fates or the gods could upset their plans—while Agrippina herself seemed not inclined to fear or rely upon either. “The gods favor those who are both prudent and self-reliant—before attacking whom the Fates think twice,” she rejoined in calm confidence.

Early in the new year was staged the next effective act in the drama, every detail of which had been planned with careful precision. Before the newly convened Senate, Vitellius made an impassioned address in favor of the marriage which he insisted was both essential to the welfare and stability of the State and in accord with the popular demand; and care to that end having been taken, a promiscuous multitude which had assembled endorsed the Censor’s declaration with tumultuous cheers. The Fathers responded with enthusiasm; a *Senatus-consultum* annulling the old law was adopted unanimously, and two days later the nuptials were celebrated.

During the short interval between the disgrace of Silanus and the imperial marriage, Agrippina had been assiduous in her efforts to win the confidence of Octavia and her little coterie of devoted friends. She sought out Pythias and spoke flatteringly of Junius, of whom she said Corbulo had written in the highest terms to the Emperor—referring also to Fabius as one of her own father’s most trusted and esteemed lieutenants. She treated Marcus with noteworthy respect, and even called on Pomponia to express the Emperor’s and her own thanks for the matron’s motherly attentions to Octavia; while for the latter she displayed the most delicate and tender consideration.

The Emperor’s daughter always had admired the reserved and accomplished woman, whose devotion to her young son and ostensibly blameless life stood out in such sharp contrast with the conduct and bearing of the selfish and dissolute women who frequented the palace. Octavia knew also of the sorrows and misery which had attended

Agrippina's early days under the persecutions of Livia, Tiberius and Caligula, because of which she was the more prepared to accept the other's simulated sympathy as the natural expression of a woman who herself had suffered keenly.

All unwittingly the forlorn young girl began to cherish for the scheming and dissimulating woman something deeper and more personal than the bare respect due her father's prospective consort. Sedulously, but with infinite caution, the latter pressed her advantage. At her instigation Claudius still refused to see his daughter: Agrippina complacently assumed the rôle of go-between, and eventually it was from her stepmother that Octavia first heard of the death of Lucius—artfully related with every manifestation of womanly sympathy. Thus in the fine irony of fate, at this culmination of her sorrow the stricken girl's first outburst of anguish was addressed to the ruthless woman, who herself had directed the blow—which in itself insensibly augmented the intimacy of their relations; since nothing draws persons together more effectively than community in sorrow.

Agrippina had seriously considered the suggestion of Vitellius that the betrothal of Octavia and Domitius should be celebrated on the wedding day. But intuitively she hesitated to invoke the Emperor's compulsion, without which she felt sure the sensitive and single-minded girl never would submit while Silanus was living. "The time is not yet ripe; rather let us proceed in fully clearing the way," she said meaningly to her confederate.

And so immediately after the marriage was legalized by the Senate, a courier departed secretly for Campania; and on the day of the nuptials, embracing the alternative graciously accorded in the order from his imperial master, the unhappy Lucius opened his veins. It was given out at the palace that unable longer to endure his merited disgrace, Silanus had committed suicide; upon which certain skeptics sarcastically observed that doubtless he

had selected that particular day "to increase the odium the deed would excite."

Marcus was among those who were not deceived: the event had tallied too closely with the dispatch of the courier, of which the watchful Decius had informed him. From the outset he had distrusted Agrippina—instinctively believing she had been a party to the plot, in support of which, however, he had been unable to adduce anything more circumstantial than the fact that Pallas was in close attendance upon the Censor the day the trap was sprung. When the tribune voiced his suspicions to Aulus Plautius the old General bluntly advised him to hold his tongue.

"Thou hast not a scintilla of proof. Even if otherwise it is too late: Lucius is dead and Agrippina is the Augusta. Thy life would not be worth an obolus if a whisper of thy suspicion should reach the palace. Ever since the affair of her red-headed boy in the Circus, I too have distrusted the woman and the freedman with whom she hath disgraced herself. But the closer we may be to the truth, the greater Octavia's need of a watchful and courageous friend; and in an emergency a live tribune is of more value than a dead oracle," he grimly concluded.

And thus for the moment, under the cunningly-devised and carefully guarded plans of the arch conspirator, the fall of Silanus was attributed generally to Vitellius alone. It remained for the future to disclose the other culprits; and for the avenging Dirae—in the fulness of time called up for the purpose from dark and gloomy Erebus—in turn to subject each of the guilty ones to the retributive justice of a violent death. Haplessly their unfortunate and innocent victim herself was swept away in the vortex.

The coming of the new Empress occasioned a striking change in the atmosphere of the palace. The sycophants and panderers who had fawned upon Claudius, and the

dissolute of both sexes who had danced attendance upon Messalina were seen no more. Most of the male intimates of the former Augusta had paid the penalty of their indiscretions: her woman associates had nothing in common with the proud and scornful Agrippina, besides which common prudence admonished that for a time they should efface themselves as much as possible.

It was the same in the case of those light-minded ladies whose friendly attentions to the Emperor his former wife complacently had tolerated—even incited, as had been openly averred, in order to divert the attention of Claudius from her own misconduct. Of these latter Calpurnia and Cleopatra, whose influence had been strengthened by their part in the downfall of Messalina, were the only ones who presumed to continue their intimacy with the Emperor after his marriage. Discreetly holding aloof for a brief period, they rashly ventured once more to approach the palace on the old footing—but attained no further than the courtyard, and never renewed the attempt. Calpurnia, for whom Claudius had manifested a special partiality, ultimately was banished by Agrippina.

Claudius speedily fell under the complete domination of his resolute and highly intelligent consort, and it must be admitted that, howsoever selfish and discreditable may have been her motive in the acquisition and exercise of power, the immediate result not only was a distinct improvement in the conduct of the imperial household, but as well a decided betterment in the exercise of the imperial authority and the comparative orderliness in public affairs.

Agrippina's first step in the consolidation of her power was the recall of Seneca from Corsica, where as a victim of Messalina's jealous rage he had dragged out eight weary years of exile. Appointed prætor and placed in charge of the education of Domitius, he became also the confidential adviser of the Empress.

Foreseeing that the accomplishment of her one great design in the last resort must depend upon the favor of the prætorians, she next addressed herself to the removal of the prefects Geta and Crispinus, who as ardent partisans of Messalina presumably would be devoted to the interest of Britannicus. Shrewdly arguing against the dangers of a divided leadership, she persuaded Claudius to transfer the two prefects and unify the command under Burrhus, who as tutor of the young Domitius had become one of her trusted adherents.

The man of letters and the soldier thus chosen were alike endowed with rare insight, and by reason of their differing temperaments and points of view—one the stoic philosopher, the man of intellect, easily the most noted of his time; the other an officer of high repute, the cool-headed, forceful man of action—each reacted effectively as a sort of counterpoise to the other. Under their guidance, and with the versatile Pallas and the unscrupulous Vitellius as the needful and willing instruments of those darker and more sinister components of the imperial policy, Agrippina exercised her despotism to an extent which Rome never before had experienced in the case of a woman. Every possible honor was accorded her—including the title of Augusta, and the privilege of riding to the Capitol in a chariot: all of which measurably heightened the reverence of the people for a woman who “as daughter, mother, sister and wife of an Emperor” had no parallel in the history of previous times.

Beyond replacing certain of the tutors of Britannicus with others of her own choosing, for the time being the Empress diplomatically refrained from interference with the existing establishment of her step-children at the other end of the palace, which she herself visited only occasionally and, at the outset, her son Domitius not at all. Her own little *familia* thus undisturbed, after the first pangs had subsided, and under the tender ministrations of Pythias and the doglike devotion of the tribune, Octavia

insensibly fell into her former habits of living, slowly emerging from her melancholy, and cheering her friends by a certain display of resiliency from her mental dejection.

Her hope indeed was crushed, and she believed the wound incurable. The disgrace and punishment of her mother had been dreadful enough; but the death of her beloved, following unmerited disgrace, had compressed her soul with such sharp agony that her selfish choice would have been to follow Lucius down the dark passage.

But there was Britannicus: and it was the consciousness of her duty to him which at the beginning saved her from bitter despair and eventually developed the reclaiming force which lifted her out of the pit. And thus after the raw edge of her wounds had healed, like so many other stricken souls, but to her greater credit because without the stimulus of their faith in Christ this sensitive, pure-hearted and sorely-wounded pagan girl struggled blindly up and forward, when all her impulses and inclinations moved her to lie down and die.

For a long time she had been unable to bring herself to visit the villa. But one day came a message from the General that Pomponia was seriously ill, earnestly entreating Octavia to come instantly. She had complied, and the ice once broken her former custom of daily journeys there was speedily resumed. Thereby all unconsciously she arrived at a momentous point in her life. In the community of their suffering—the matron for a while undergoing great physical pain—Pomponia for the first time made a full disclosure to the wondering Octavia of the Truth which she had found—deliberately sowing the seed of the New Faith in soil which had been torn and loosened by the plow of adversity and pulverized by the harrow-teeth of shame and anguish, its germinating powers set free and quickened in the alembic of sorrow and despair.

The beautiful Roman spring had come and gone and the summer solstice, with its parching heat, was close at hand. In the early morning of the eleventh of June, Octavia and Pythias had gone to the Forum Boarium to witness the *Matralia*, the Festival of Mothers, which was celebrated annually on that day by the women of Rome in honor of the *Mater Matuta*, the Latin goddess of dawn and of birth.

Forming in the Campus Martius, the procession of women marched sedately between the silent and respectful crowds massed along the Via Triumphalis to the temple of the goddess opposite the great bend in the Tiber, a little to the west of the Circus Maximus. No slaves were admitted to the shrine, and only those matrons who had been married but once were allowed to place a wreath upon the statue of the goddess. Clad in the long white *stola*, their hair divided in six plaits wound round with *vittæ*, those who were accredited deposited their wreaths, praying first for their nephews and nieces and then for the welfare of their own children.

"Always hath it been to me one of the most beautiful of the ancient customs," mused Octavia, dreamily. She had been silent during their return to the palace, and now was sitting with Pythias in a shady corner of the little garden. "They pray first for the children of others—afterwards for their own: and the goddess turns her face alone to such as have promised but once before the Flamens. I would that it might have been for me some time to place my wreath in the temple," she concluded, with a far-away look.

"But still it may come to thee, *cara*," Pythias said timidly.

Octavia shook her head: "I have made my promise and the gods have taken him. Pomponia says that sometime—somewhere—yet I may find him again. Although that is a thing I cannot comprehend, I do know that I belong to

him alone, and none other may fill his place with me. I would not care to be a Roman mother if the privilege of the temple of Matuta were denied me," she said proudly.

"But if perchance sometime thou shouldst marry, surely what hath happened without thy fault would not bar thee," urged Pythias.

"It would bar me in my own consciousness," said Octavia resolutely—"although 'tis a question of casuistry only, since now I never shall marry. None ever could move me to forget my love for Lucius—and my promise to him. Would that the gates of Vesta were still open for me," she added regretfully.

Pythias heard her with disquietude. It had come to her that Pollio, the Consul-elect, had proposed to the Senate that the Emperor should be solicited "to betroth Octavia to Domitius," and that it was supposed Claudius had the matter under consideration.

"I know there is none among those worthy by birth to whom thou wouldst listen willingly. But we have been taught that for all women of rank marriage is a duty owed the State. And there is the law of the *familia*; surely thou dost not forget thy father's authority?"

"Oh, yes," the other answered carelessly, "of course I know all about that—the *patria potestas*. It was only yesterday Seneca was discussing it with the Augusta when I was with them in the library at the temple of Apollo."

Pythias regarded her curiously. Despite her apparent calmness and unconcern, Octavia's manner betrayed a certain constraint to the quick-witted girl, who wondered if her friend was as frankly confidential as usual. Yes, Octavia also must have heard the rumors, and apprehended that Seneca and the Augusta had been sounding her on the subject. "How came it that they spoke of it?" she inquired in a casual tone.

"Why," said Octavia, reflectively, "they had been talking about Seneca's *Treatise on Anger*, and the discussion turned to the bringing up of children. The Augusta

remarked that so far as freedom of choice is concerned the children of the high-born are no better off than those of slaves; in one case the father, in the other the master, determines every matter of importance, without regard to the wishes of the child—as to the wisdom and justice of which she expressed grave doubt. Whereupon Seneca discoursed learnedly upon the ancient establishment which he said was based on the patriarchal theory that all members of the family are subject to the power of the *pater familias*, who is clothed with absolute authority over his children—even to the extent of exposing, killing or selling them; and this *patria potestas* he declared had long been proved essential both for the upholding of the aristocracy and the safety of the State.

“And thus it results,” she concluded, “that no woman of rank ever may aspire to the right of choosing her own husband—which provision this wise and learned philosopher gravely insists is entirely reasonable as necessary for the well-governing of the State and to safeguard and perpetuate the social fabric which has given rise to the wrong”—tossing her head disdainfully, and with a bitterness of inflection to which her voice was unaccustomed.

Listening intently and, as the other proceeded, with growing astonishment, Pythias became aware of a subtle change which disclosed itself in Octavia’s expression and bearing. Although at the moment unable to define its full significance, as related to herself it gave rise to a curious sort of feeling that while she had been standing still, at a single step Octavia had overtaken and passed her in the thoughts and emotions which are the concomitants of maturity and serve sharply to demarcate the line between the hopes and illusions of girlhood and the sobering realizations of womanhood. Surprise kept her silent, and after a moment, reverting to her usual gentle and placatory tone, Octavia resumed:

“With all his shortcomings my father hath kindness and love for me, and now that I am no longer a child I

cannot believe that against my will he would force me to such an act." Then under a sudden rush of emotion she cried passionately, "Oh! it could not be possible! Already have I endured my share: surely the gods will not burden me with this final sorrow"; and all composure lost, she bowed her head upon the other's shoulder and gave way to tears.

"Hush, *cara*," Pythias whispered soothingly, "some one comes!" and hastily disengaging herself she ran down the path in time to intercept Marcus on the farther side of the hedge opening. The tribune bore a message for Octavia from the Emperor, who desired her attendance.

Arriving at that precise moment the summons startled her, and although Marcus met her searching glance with his customary smiling complacency and Octavia herself appeared unconcerned, Pythias watched them depart with sharp foreboding.

Claudius looked badly. Time and his vices had begun to exact their toll. He was haggard and depressed, the staring eyes indicating either a recent over-indulgence in wine or the approach of one of those fits to which he was subject. Octavia forgot her own troubles and apprehensions as her tender heart went out in sympathy for him: but as if desirous of concluding the interview as soon as possible, he broke in upon her filial greetings with the fretful assertion that he was growing old, his health was failing, and it behooved him no longer to postpone discharge of his duty to his children.

"'Tis time thou shouldst marry and fulfill thine own duty to the State of bearing children," he bluntly continued. "Already the Senate hath deliberated upon it and recommended thy betrothal to the Augusta's son, who is thine equal in birth, is in the direct Julian line and, as a Germanicus, holds the regard of the people. Domitius is in truth a comely youth, and Seneca and the prefect in turn speak highly of his mental gifts and manly parts. I have decreed it; go to the Augusta and get thee ready for

the betrothal ceremony on the morrow." The Emperor spoke rapidly in a thick, mumbling voice, with occasional glances in the direction of a screened doorway at his left—his manner not unlike that of a recalcitrant boy in the enforced performance of a distasteful task.

As Pythias had conjectured, Octavia was not entirely taken by surprise. But she had not supposed the matter would come to a head so quickly, while her father's unfeeling abruptness was as great a shock as it was a disappointment to her.

She had no time for deliberation: Claudius had spoken with an air of finality, and evidently considered the matter at an end. Mustering all her spirit she said with quiet emphasis:

"Perchance thou hast not fully considered. My heart is with Silanus, to whom thyself betrothed me as an unthinking child, and who had my promise also at a time when I knew its meaning. Moreover," she added deliberately, "I do not love Domitius."

Glaring at her in mingled surprise and anger, Claudius laughed unpleasantly. "There is no such thing as love," he sneered; "'tis only a word used by poets and the vulgar, and even with these meaneth nothing but passion, which occasion cultivates for every one, and as lightly vanishes. As for Silanus, he is dead; thy promise to him meant nothing and long since hath been forgot as if it never had been. Thy father who commanded it freed thee from it—as Silanus himself might have done either before or after marriage. And 'tis thy father who determined this new betrothal. 'Tis the Roman custom—and the Roman law—for thee to obey"; and exhausted by his unaccustomed vehemence, he sank back in his chair, his eyes dulling again as his voice trailed off into indistinct mutterings.

Octavia fell on her knees and caught the hand which hung supinely beside the cushioned *cathedra* in which the Emperor lay humped. "It is so painful and repugnant to

me, my father—and comes so suddenly! I know the law—and I must obey—always have I been dutiful. But spare me this thing which I dread so greatly”; and then, as Claudius obstinately shook his head, she pleaded brokenly, “Grant at least another day—that I may reflect, and counsel with the Lady Pomponia—I have no mother to guide me.”

For an instant the Emperor regarded her in stupid wonder; then in a sudden access of rage, the flaccid muscles about his weak mouth working convulsively, he shouted:

“If thy mother were here, she would tell thee not to lose a day even—but marry and then take thy love where and when thou wouldst, making a fool of thy husband like all other women—as also is the Roman custom. But have thy silly wish, and it shall not be until the day after the morrow. Unburden thyself to the wife of Aulus—and to the Augusta, who hath had much experience” (in a lowered voice and with a ghastly leer in the direction of the screen). “And the wise Seneca,” he added sneeringly, “who can make white black and black white—fail not to discuss it with the stoic philosopher, who is given to propounding rules of conduct for everyone except himself”; and petulantly waving his hand in dismissal, with flushed face and wildly rolling eyes, he sank down among the cushions.

Spurred by anger and mortification, Octavia took a step forward, as if she would speak again—then realizing that Claudius was practically insensible, with a contemptuous glance at the screen which presumably concealed one of the freedmen, she proudly left the room.

A moment later Agrippina emerged from behind the tapestry and after a keen glance at the unconscious Claudius, glided noiselessly across the floor and swiftly drawing a curtain which hung in front of a little alcove, disclosed Narcissus, the Secretary, who also had been eavesdropping.

"Thou wouldst better cease thy spying and act with us," she said coldly, turning her back before the embarrassed freedman could find a word in rejoinder.

Octavia hurried to the vestibule, where Marcus was lounging with the guards, and abruptly directed him to order a litter to take her to the villa.

For once the tribune lost his poise: "Thou hast not eaten and the way is long: surely thou wilt await the passing of the heated hours?" he hazarded.

With a flash of her mother's own spirit she answered imperiously, "I will go at once—and quickly!" and the abashed tribune hurried away, muttering savagely, "In the name of all the gods, what hath that villainous Claudius done to her now?"

The sun's rays fairly blistered as they turned into the Via, and the *lecticarii*, compelled by the tribune to maintain a rapid pace, suffered intensely, all unnoticed by their usually considerate mistress. Concealed by the curtains which, despite the stifling heat, she had drawn closely, Octavia raged in silent fury. It was such a monstrous wrong; her father must be insane. And that fat, coarse-featured boy, with his red hair and overbearing ways—gods! she could not stand it—it was too terrible—she would kill herself before she would submit. But as the thought formed, Britannicus came to mind; and with a low moan she buried her face in the pillows.

Then it became plain that there was no escape for her. She knew what the Augusta and Pomponia would say: one would point to the law, the other to duty. Why then appeal to them? It would only be another time of weeping—of pity and sympathy expressed—of discomfort for all of them, and nothing gained. Indeed, why put off the evil day? The blow had fallen, the hurt could be no greater. And in impulsive and final acceptance of her lot, she flung back the curtains and cried to Marcus, "I will return to the palace—the heat is unendurable."

Without a change in his expression, nonchalantly the

tribune gave the order, keeping the bearers at the same rapid pace even while climbing the hill. The men were at the point of exhaustion on arrival at the courtyard, when for the first time Octavia noted their condition. Strangely the fact instead of awakening self-reproach, actually seemed to inflame her anger; but with an effort she commanded herself and said to Marcus, "Give these men a dole, and excuse them for the remainder of the day—and thyself wait for a letter I would send Cæsar."

Without a word of explanation to Pythias, who had been anxiously waiting and was far more distressed by the other's unnatural manner than she had been concerned by her protracted absence, Octavia went directly to her study and wrote her father:

OCTAVIA to TIBERIUS CLAUDIUS NERO

I have reflected—and obey thy command. Let it be on the morrow, as thou didst first determine: for me, as well then as ever, since my heart rebels against marriage with Domitius, who is abhorrent to me, and I yield alone to the *patria potestas*.

NERO AND BRITANNICUS

THERE had been no adoption in the patrician family of the Claudii, one of the noblest in Roman history, since its foundation by Appius Claudius, five centuries before the Christian era. The fourth Emperor reasonably might have relied upon Britannicus, then a sturdy, vigorous youth of ten, to maintain the unbroken male descent. But the weak and irresolute old man, artfully prepared by Agrippina, was easily moved by the specious argument of Pallas that "the infancy of Britannicus should be supported by a collateral stay"; citing the examples of Augustus and Tiberius in the adoption by them respectively of Livia's sons and of Germanicus. Claudius having acquiesced, a law was enacted decreeing the imperial adoption of Agrippina's son under the name of Nero.

To his mother the latter incident was of no less importance than the fact itself. The youth for whom she was paving the way to the loftiest position in the Roman world should not be hampered by the hated name of Domitius, which had come to him from a progenitor noted for his brutal disposition and evil life. Once the father had deliberately crushed a child who had strayed in front of his horses in the Appian Way: he had killed a freedman for refusing to drink to intoxication; and in a moment of rage, excited by a trivial discussion with a Roman knight in the Forum, he had savagely thrust out his friend's eye.

The husband of Agrippina belonged to that branch of the *gens Domitius* called "Ahenobarbus" (Brazen-beard.) Like many Roman families the Ahenobarbi claimed a con-

nection with the gods: in their case the tradition being that after the battle of Lake Regillus a member of the family was chosen by Castor and Pollux to bear news of the victory to the magistrates. In proof of their divine agency the Dioscuri by a touch changed the color of the messenger's hair from black to red, a physical characteristic which thereafter prevailed in the family and was conspicuous in Agrippina's son. In its association with his father the name had become one of reproach and contempt; so that the proud daughter of Germanicus gladly embraced for her son the opportunity for its official expurgation in favor of the Claudian family cognomen of Nero, an old Sabine word meaning brave and hardy.

But any hopes cherished by the mother that a change in name would free her son from his inherited paternal tendencies were of short duration. Possessed of mediocre talents, under the apt tutelage of Seneca, who was especially fitted for the part, Nero indeed made some progress in accumulating appearances to conceal the lack of substance. And since in early youth his personal appearance was engaging, through these superficial traits at the outset it was not difficult to arouse a popular predisposition in behalf of the "grandson of Germanicus." But none who knew him intimately—Seneca least of all—was deceived as to his real nature. Of poor intellectual abilities, inordinately vain, selfish, hypocritical, malicious and cruel, the supremacy of his dormant brute impulses awaited only the incentive of fully awakened appetite and the boundless opportunities afforded by unlimited power.

His preceptors, the soldier Burrhus and the Rhetorician who mistakenly considered himself a philosopher, unwisely concluded that by encouraging him in the free indulgence of youthful follies and errors, he would be diverted from those graver vices and excesses to which, as they saw plainly, nature inclined him. As if restricting a captive wild beast to a diet of cooked meat would dissuade it from

the lust for fresh blood, when turned loose in the jungle! "Compensate thyself with the pleasures of youth without compunction so long as thou injurest no man," counseled Seneca, complacently. His willing pupil followed the advice just long enough for love of the baser pleasures to become his ruling passion; then his brute nature took full command, and in the end complete gratification of his desires was to be obtained only through incidental suffering inflicted upon others.

As a careless, good-natured boy, Octavia had regarded him approvingly; but when a few years later he came to live at the palace, the arrogant, domineering youth, with his vanity and shallow pretense, aroused in her a dislike and distrust which with all her native kindness she could not overcome. Under the Roman system, except in early childhood, she had few opportunities of association with young men of her own rank and age; but compared with Marcus—who, although an attendant, was a Roman Knight of good birth—Junius Varus or Silanus, all of whom were older than herself, or with Pomponia's kinsman Agricola, a handsome, spirited boy of the same age as Agrippina's son, the latter made a poor showing in respect of all manly qualities. Britannicus, younger by several years, already surpassed him in height and physical development—Nero being short, thick-set, with low brow and heavy features; the other tall and well-knit beyond his years, with handsome, open countenance, and a boyish indication of Messalina's proud bearing.

After the betrothal, prompted by his mother, Nero made some overtures to his stepbrother, for whom Agrippina also pretended friendly concern. But Britannicus would have none of it. He regarded Nero as an interloper. Friends, well-meaning and otherwise, were not wanting to remind him of the affair in the Great Circus during the Trojan Game; and now of an age to appreciate the significance of what had occurred, it rankled deeply. The young prince was intelligent and endowed with quick

perceptions; and from the gossip and tittle-tattle of his attendants, and especially a few suggestions artfully planted by Narcissus in preparation for the inevitable contest with the Augusta which the cunning and experienced Secretary foresaw, Britannicus learned enough to form a reasonably accurate opinion of his stepmother's motives. Deaf to Octavia's gentle remonstrances, he persisted in his hostile attitude toward Agrippina and her son—with boyish bravado openly ridiculing the officious attentions of his stepmother and for Nero displaying at best a patronizing tolerance. And at a chance meeting with the latter directly after the adoption, when Domitius saluted his new brother as "Britannicus," the latter pointedly refused such recognition of the relationship as would be implied by use of the name Nero, with thinly veiled contempt addressing the other as "Ahenobarbus": at which the elder boy flew into a passion and called Britannicus a "changeling."

Agrippina went straight to Claudius, complaining that all her efforts in carrying out the will of Cæsar and the wise designs of the Senate for stabilizing and safeguarding the imperial establishment were being undermined and frustrated by a headstrong, impetuous boy, misled by evil-minded hirelings and slaves. In his indolence and blind condescension the Emperor stupidly walked into the trap, and made a clean sweep of all the preceptors and attendants of Britannicus, entrusting to the Empress the selection of their successors and the future direction of his son's establishment.

Proceeding with customary resolution and thoroughness, it was not long before Agrippina had her stepson completely isolated and under constant espionage: his education was neglected, he rarely saw his father, and was treated generally more like a state prisoner than the son of Cæsar.

All this was effected so skillfully that it was attributed alone to the Emperor by the distressed Octavia, who

ingenuously pleaded with the subtle and dissimulating Augusta to intervene in her brother's behalf, after failure of her own efforts for a mitigation of the severity and harshness with which he was treated. Pretending compliance, the Augusta reported that Narcissus had been the prime mover in what had occurred; that he feared Britannicus because of his treachery to Messalina, and wanted to keep him at a distance from the Emperor. But she declared consolingly that the Secretary's influence with Cæsar was on the wane, and while nothing could be done at the moment, her brother's discomfort would be temporary, and in the meantime the discipline would not be to his disadvantage—really he had been both discourteous to herself and Nero and disrespectful to Cæsar and the Senate.

Restricted for the most part to the companionship of unsympathetic, if not actually hostile freedmen and underlings, neglected by his tutor, whose main function indeed was that of a spy, the unhappy youth fell into a state of dejection which wrung his sister's heart. But his anger blazed when in an effort to soften his hostility to their stepmother she mentioned Nero's name.

"I hate him," he cried passionately. "He is no brother of mine, and never will I call him anything but 'Red Head.' Thou art foolish to let his mother pull the wool over thine eyes. Narcissus told me she is a bad woman, that our father fears her and she makes him do what she wants, that she was the one who got him to send Rufius and Geta away from the Camp and put old Burrhus in their place. When my father sends for me always she is there and hears every word. They never let me see Agricola—or Marcus or Decius, or anyone I care for, or do anything I want to"; and the wretched boy burst into a flood of weeping.

She took him in her arms, turning her face that he might not observe her own tears, and whispering that he must be brave and hopeful, promised that she would go to

their father and get leave for Marcus to take him to the Circus. Full of her purpose she went directly to the Emperor's apartments; but Claudius had gone to inspect the great "Anio Novus" aqueduct, now so near completion that it was hoped its water would be flowing into Rome on the Emperor's coming birthday.

The perplexity occasioned by her brother's disclosure added greatly to Octavia's distress. Always she had disliked and feared Narcissus. She knew he had caused her mother's downfall, and believed him capable of any wickedness to further his own ends. From the contradictory stories told by Agrippina and Britannicus, Narcissus must be playing a double part, and the conviction made her more distrustful of accomplishing anything with her father. In her helplessness she sent for Marcus, who however seemed strangely silent and uncommunicative when she sought his opinion and advice—finally suggesting that she would better talk with Aulus Plautius before going to the Emperor.

Since his angry outburst about Silanus the General never had revisited the palace—declaring that if he went there again it would be only at Cæsar's command. He listened in frowning silence to Octavia's story, regarding her keenly while she was recounting Agrippina's efforts in her brother's behalf.

"No doubt the Augusta is right as to how it came about," he said drily, with a guarded side-glance at the stolid-faced tribune; "Narcissus always hath been an overzealous servant. But go thou now to Pomponia and let me reflect: my mind grows as dull as my joints have become stiff in this lazy country life. After I have talked awhile with Marcus, he shall bear word that thou wilt remain here overnight, and return with that mischief-loving daughter of Fabius to cheer us with her impertinence. Then on the morrow we will decide what is best to do."

In the end Aulus swallowed his pride, and early the

following day went to the palace. The Emperor greeted him warmly, upbraiding him for his long absence. When Aulus brought the conversation around to the real object of his visit, Claudius made light of the affair. Britannicus had been rude to the Augusta and Nero: as soon as he mended his ways the trouble would be over.

“When I asked if he thought it well to follow the advice of Narcissus in a matter of family discipline, instead of listening to the Augusta,” said Aulus in relating to Marcus what had occurred, “there came a sound as if someone were approaching through the little door behind the curtained alcove. But no one appeared, and after listening a moment, the Emperor abruptly changed the subject, nor could I bring him to it again. Of course there was an eavesdropper, who I assumed was Narcissus, until a little later I met him coming out of the Tabularium while on my way to the *carcer* to see old Rufius, who is ill. I resolved to take a chance with the Greek and leading him aside put the question to him squarely. He declared stoutly that he had nothing to do with the affair; on the contrary that repeatedly he had warned Cæsar his treatment of Britannicus was a blunder and involved great danger—the fact that he didn’t call it an ‘injustice’ gave color of truth to his tale!

“Then he whispered that Agrippina is determined to break and humiliate the boy and that Seneca and Burrhus are parties to it. When I asked who he supposed was listening during my talk with Cæsar, he smiled sourly and said mayhap the Augusta could tell me. *Perpol!* were I sure she is the one, I’d free my mind to her if it cost my head! But keep thou out of it, Marcus—as I cautioned at the beginning. While it is hard for Octavia, if I mistake not there is worse to come, and there will be occasion to serve her more to the purpose than by fruitlessly banging our heads against a stonewall in the dark.”

Although disappointed, Octavia also was in a measure relieved by the General’s guarded report of his interview

with the Emperor. She resolved to write her father asking leave for Britannicus to attend the Circensian Games; and when Agrippina herself came, not only with the desired permission but with word that her brother was to march in the procession, after thanking her effusively, she flew to Britannicus with the good news, which she tried to persuade both herself and him was a precursor of happier days.

As matter of fact, the granting of Octavia's request was occasioned neither by paternal kindness nor momentary yielding on the part of Augustus. The attendance of Britannicus at the Games was an essential part of the programme—his presence being necessary to complete the staging of an important scene in Agrippina's drama.

While the Emperor's son was being effaced and humiliated, Nero had been conspicuously honored and advanced. After Claudius had permitted him to lay aside the *prætexta* of boyhood and assume the manly gown in advance of the fixed age, by decree of the Senate he had become Consul-elect, to take office on his twentieth birthday, in the meantime clothed with the pro-consular authority outside the city. He had twice harangued the Senate, in Greek and Latin, respectively—the addresses composed by Seneca and committed to memory by his pupil: and in return the magistrates had addressed him as *princeps-juventus*—prince of the Roman youth! In his name a generous *donativum* of money had been distributed among the prætorians, and a substantial *congiarium* of food, wine and oil among the people. Already as prætor he had given magnificent games and gladiatorial combats. Medals were struck, bearing his head surrounded by solar rays, his statue was erected in close proximity to the marble figures of the Cæsars, and he had enjoyed the signal honor of marching at the head of the prætorians.

Forgetful of his own son, Claudius publicly ratified all these honors, and on an occasion when he was leaving Rome to offer a sacrifice in the Alban Mountains, the

blind and imbecile Cæsar even conferred the prefecture of the city during his absence upon his immature stepson.

Of course it was Agrippina, either upon her own initiative or through the machinations of Pallas and the others, who brought all this about. She never overlooked an opportunity to keep Nero in the public eye and, within discreet limits, to parade him as the successor of Claudius. And now came the climax, when in the triumphal procession—the stately *pompa circensis*, which wound down from the Capitol into the Forum, along the Sacra Via to the Tuscus, through the Velabrum and the Forum Boarium to the Porta Pompæ of the Great Circus—the son of Agrippina appeared wearing the triumphal robe, the *toga picta*, adorned with golden stars, adopted by Cæsar on festal occasions, its use otherwise restricted to a general celebrating his triumph, or a magistrate giving public games; and behind him Britannicus, clad in the *prætecta*, the gold bulla still around his neck, “so that the people beholding one in a general’s robe preceding the other in the habit of a boy, might anticipate the destiny of both!”

As the procession after passing around the *spina* paused to offer sacrifices and salute the Emperor, Claudius joined in the acclaim to “Germanicus—Nero” which split the air—while Britannicus passed by unnoticed. And Agrippina—again sitting with the vestals but this time in a front seat—at last saw the long-coveted prize well within reach. Her implacable resolution, her cool calculation, her relentless determination, her long perseverance had triumphed over every obstacle—and the gods and the Fates had bent their will to hers!

She glanced triumphantly at Pallas, standing at the curtain, as on that other similar occasion. The Greek smiled and drawing closer whispered, “’Tis the only cry to-day—louder than it was five years ago and far more significant! Messalina is out of the way—and Silanus; and thou art the Augusta, and he is Nero the Claudian

prince, betrothed to Cæsar's daughter! *Salve, Nero, Imperator!*"

Gratified and proud as she was, not for an instant did Agrippina lose her poise. She knew the race was never won until the last fish came down; indeed that in the moment of victory its fruits might vanish. There was that wretched "Crow": if he had kept his eye on his horses and his hands on the reins after making the final turn, instead of prematurely proclaiming his victory to that slave woman in the upper benches, the guerdon would have been something more substantial than a tablet set in the *spina*.

In her own contest also the prize had not yet been reduced to possession. Claudius was still living: the populace was fickle and easily swayed, and she had never felt absolutely certain that Octavia, who was popular and possessed devoted friends, would not balk at the last moment. And with the shouts for Nero still ringing in her ears, the indefatigable woman was considering her next move.

That which had given her the greatest concern was the intimacy between Octavia and the family of Aulus Plautius. Pomponia's husband was the one man in Rome for whom the Augusta had a wholesome respect. Immune from fear or flattery and far above the baser appeals, esteemed and trusted by Claudius and secure in the admiration and affections of the people, she recognized in him a force to be reckoned with if his opposition should be aroused. In the case of Silanus, for example, she had never doubted that if Aulus had gained the Emperor's ear in time the affair would have ended disastrously. Also she was convinced it was at the instance of either Pomponia or Octavia he had interrogated Claudius about the affair of Britannicus, disclosure of her complicity in which had been averted by the narrowest margin.

She had made no headway with Pomponia, all of

Agrippina's advancements having been received coldly by the other, with whom indeed the Augusta had absolutely nothing in common: she had cherished a positive dislike for her cousin Julia, who had been Pomponia's most intimate friend, for whom the matron still wore the garb of mourning. Altogether at the present moment the upright soldier and his impeccable wife appeared to constitute the greatest menace to the successful outcome of her project. She dared not risk the final moves in the game until this potent source of danger should have been disrupted.

A few days after the Circensian Games Aulus was summoned to the palace, where he found Agrippina with the Emperor waiting to receive him; and to his unbounded surprise was informed by Claudius that he was to be recalled to active service.

"With Britain in unrest, the Rhine and Danube insufficiently guarded and Corbulo in the East, Rome is badly in need of a man of force and genius to protect her northern frontier. In such an emergency it were inexcusable in thee longer to deprive the State of thy energy and rare ability. Thou shalt be assigned to the command in Mœsia until such time when, at thine own request, thou mayst return to receive the plaudits and acclaim of the Roman people, and enjoy to the full the sunset of life. In truth, 'tis a great opportunity to crown thy splendid accomplishments at the head of the legions with a notable service. It is that which to an extent reconciles me to thy loss—since in thy designation I have yielded alone to the paramount claim of the State"; and the Emperor, who had an exalted opinion of his own eloquence, puffed with complacency as he concluded.

Aulus drew himself up proudly and gave the military salute as he answered stiffly, "It shall be as Cæsar wills." Although startled by the unexpected call, at heart he was not ill-pleased. He was still vigorous and alert, and of

late had fretted not a little at his protracted inactivity, so foreign to his nature and out of accord with the habits of a long life spent in the camps.

Agrippina was relieved by the prompt acquiescence of Aulus. With easily assumed friendliness she praised his high spirit and proffered the good offices of the imperial household in behalf of Pomponia during her husband's absence: "Because, of course, thy wife will not accompany thee?" she hazarded.

Aulus shook his head smilingly. "She is contented and happy in the duties and joys of her simple home. Moreover, always she hath shared my belief that a woman is out of place in the military service with her husband."

"In that she hath the more honor, as I believe, although my mother thought otherwise and spent her life in the camps. But tell us what may be done for Pomponia's greater comfort and happiness—and for thyself ask anything of Cæsar"; at which Claudius nodded eagerly.

"I want nothing but Cæsar's confidence and regard," proudly replied Aulus, "and that depends alone upon my own performance and desert. But the years have been taking their toll, I am rusty and should have someone of intelligence, energy and approved integrity upon whom to rely: perchance Cæsar would assign to me the young tribune Junius Varus, who hath been trained under Corbulo and is with the army on the Rhine."

"Thou art just in time," exclaimed Claudius; "only yesterday came word from Corbulo that he was ordering Varus to report to him in Parthia. Messengers are leaving tonight for the Rhine camp and Junius shall proceed at once to Mœsia to await thine arrival."

Aulus bowed his acknowledgment and prepared to withdraw. For a moment Agrippina studied him intently; then rising said with a grave smile, "There is something thou wouldst say to Cæsar—I will withdraw."

"No," replied Aulus, with sudden resolution; "since with woman's wit thou hast divined and prompted me to

what otherwise might have remained unspoken, I beg thy presence, and in truth would have thine approval of what I shall propose.

“It hath been whispered that Pomponia hath embraced some foreign superstition and engages in false worship. I have been unable to trace the slander to its source,” looking steadily at the Augusta, “and find it hard to believe that any but the most abandoned would utter a suspicion of wrongdoing against the noblest woman in Rome. But if she—or I—have unknown enemies, who taking advantage of my absence presume to make such charges openly, I crave Cæsar’s promise that the ancient right of putting her upon trial shall be accorded me and that I shall be summoned promptly that she may be consigned alone to my own adjudication.”

Agrippina regarded him with mingled curiosity and respect. Aware that he was a man of resolution and address, she had not considered him capable of the shrewd resourcefulness displayed in so adroit a proposal. And it stirred her better feelings that upon the eve of departure upon what for a man of his years would be an arduous undertaking his main concern was the safety and welfare of a faded, melancholy old woman—his wife to be sure, but who never had borne him a child. Impressed by the calm sense of power manifested in his laconic avowal, the ingenuous confidence in his wife which was implied awakened emotions long since stifled and forgotten in her relentless quest—the figure of her father standing out in sharp relief, with his courage, his simple faith, his devotion to her dauntless mother, the elder Agrippina.

Before the slow-witted Claudius could answer, impulsively extending her hand she said with quiet emphasis:

“Have not a fear for Pomponia Græcina. If during thine absence one vile informer dares open his lips, they shall close in death: by the Great Mother of the gods, I vow it! Thou art sure of Cæsar’s friendship and support in all things: at least in this one, which hath touched me

deeply, be certain that the daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina also may be relied upon."

And with Claudius gaping in amazement, and Aulus too much overcome with surprise for other than a respectful salutation, the Augusta withdrew with a feeling which she recognized with chagrin as so closely akin to remorse that she herself was startled by her strange weakness.

FOOD OF THE GODS

ON a morning in early October of the year following the departure of Aulus for his post on the Danube, Marcus Ælius was slowly descending the Vicus Apollinus, with no more definite object in view than to while away a few hours in the Forum. After stopping in front of the fruit shop of the former steward of Caius Silius on the Velia, to exchange greetings with the jovial Pyrrhus, now fat and prosperous, he proceeded along the Summa Sacra Via, idly staring at the display of the hundred and one jewelers' and goldsmiths' shops, then sauntered lazily down the gentle slope towards the heart of the Roman world.

Although, in furtherance of the imperial policy of excluding eloquence from the domain of politics, the first Emperor had "pacified" the public square—to use the expression of Tacitus—the art of public speaking had lost none of its popularity in Rome, and entertainment of this sort in some form was rarely wanting in the Forum, where always eager audiences might be counted upon by an orator discoursing upon whatsoever subject. To avoid a crowd which blocked the street between the temple of Julius Cæsar and the Basilica Æmilia eagerly listening to a spirited controversy between rival philosophers, Marcus kept to the left, skirted the Atrium of the Vestals, passed through the Arch of Augustus, and forcing his way across the crowded Tuscus, climbed the broad steps of the Basilica Julia. At the base of one of the huge fluted columns he found a comfortable resting place, and gazed

apathetically upon the animated scene which filled the vision.

The area between the two great Basilicas which flanked the ancient meeting place at its upper end was filled with a seething multitude. Over to the right the debate of the philosophers was still in full swing—although fast approaching the antithesis of philosophy, to judge from the angry gestures of the speakers and the roars of laughter and applause on the part of the audience. At the other extremity, in front of the rostra, another animated group was awaiting the advent of a funeral *pompa*, which had been proclaimed. On the tribune's left, in the vicinity of the stalls of the *Argentarii*, near the corner of the *Vicus Jugarius*, an auction sale of slaves was in progress, while on the other side, approaching in solemn procession along the *Sacra Via* from the northeast, the centumviral court was on its way to a session in the *Basilica Julia*, into which latter was pouring an endless stream of humanity, to mass the hall and pack the galleries—the men on one side, the women on the other—in anticipation of speeches by eminent lawyers in a celebrated inheritance cause which was to be heard.

Besides these noteworthy centers of special movement to challenge attention, there were to be seen the usual motley assemblage of hucksters, slaves, soldiers and idlers of all classes and conditions: plebeians and patricians, priests and magistrates, rubbing elbows as they drifted along or pushed their way about—apparently responding to the fine weather with a corresponding flow of high spirits and lively good humor.

A litter, rich in ivory and with sumptuous hangings, forces its way through the eddying crowds under the urgency of its fair occupant, anxious to reach the scene of the slave auction. Necromancers and jugglers from Africa and snake-charmers from the far East industriously perform their subtle tricks under the charmed and gaping attention of their respective admirers. In chairs

or on foot the highborn and wealthy, with their trains of attendants and flatterers, press towards the stalls of the booksellers, bankers and merchants, or foregather for idle gossip near the arches, monuments and other structures: while throngs of the devout and those anxious to consult the oracles, some bearing gifts with which to propitiate the gods, are entering the temples, wreathed with the smoke of sacrifice from their many altars.

The tribune, dull and listless, stared without interest or emotion whatsoever at the rapidly shifting human panorama which unfolded before him. Of late time had hung heavily on his hands, and there were hours—of which the present was one—when his condition was one of brooding melancholy.

He still retained his position as Captain of Octavia's guard; but in the main his service had become perfunctory. Since her marriage the unhappy wife of Nero had led a secluded life, passing most of the time in her apartments, or at the great library in the Temple of Apollo. So that the colorless monotony of the young soldier's official routine was varied only by accompanying his mistress on an occasional visit to Pomponia's villa, or his attendance upon Pythias in the execution of some errand for Octavia.

Restless and dissatisfied, more than once Marcus had been on the point of appealing to Octavia for his release and the exercise of her good offices to effect his transfer to Mœsia, under Aulus Plautius. But invariably Pomponia had dissuaded him: "Thou art the only man upon whom she may rely in time of need, and if my husband were here I know he would remind thee of a soldier's duty," she would urge convincingly. And thus, always yielding to her persuasion, his "bondage," as he termed it, had dragged its tedious course through almost a year.

Shortly after the Circensian Games in which Britannicus had been so humiliated, Claudius had fallen seriously ill. Agrippina promptly embraced the opportunity to

still further accredit her son with both Emperor and people, and incidentally accomplish the last stage in her carefully laid plan, preparatory to its grand climax. Nero appeared before the Senate, attesting the gods in behalf of Cæsar, for whose recovery he vowed a splendid celebration in the arena. A slight improvement in the Emperor's condition seemed to indicate the deities had been favorably impressed; and when Claudius was told of his adopted son's effective intercession, he readily yielded to Agrippina's suggestion that Octavia's marriage to Nero should be solemnized at once.

In a last desperate effort to escape her fate Octavia pleaded the impropriety, if not actual illegality, of a marriage between adoptive brother and sister: at the instigation of the resourceful Empress Claudius brushed aside any possible impediment of the kind by a disruption of the relationship through Octavia's adoption into another family!

The nuptials had been solemnized with more precipitation than pomp, but the games vowed by Nero were given as part of the marriage celebration. Octavia was forced to appear at the Circus and listen to the plaudits of the populace—wild with enthusiasm over the marriage of its favorite with the recognized and popular heir apparent to the purple. Already she had learned to mask her emotions, and proudly concealed her misery and despair. But the bloody combats of gladiators and wild beasts were particularly abhorrent to a heart in mourning and, perhaps with Pomponia's example in mind, she resolved never again to attend a public spectacle.

There resulted the less difficulty in adhering to her resolution because, sharpened by her cold reserve, Nero's indifference to her soon developed into a positive dislike, approaching open hostility. With all her subtle diplomacy Agrippina had been unable to bridge the chasm between the ill-assorted pair. Octavia frankly informed the Augusta that she could not bring herself to like Nero,

coldly declaring that she submitted to the marriage only under her father's compulsion, and that she would welcome the earliest possible exercise of her husband's marital privilege to divorce her.

Everything of course was known to the little coterie of Octavia's friends, whose hearts ached for the unfortunate young girl. The devotion of Pythias was intensified, and since the intimacy of her relations with Nero's wife was not materially lessened, she suffered less than Marcus, who saw his mistress so rarely that the change was akin to banishment.

In the long periods of idleness which ensued the tribune spent much time at the training quarters of Gallus, boxing and wrestling with the *lanista's* athletes and engaging in short sword practice with the gladiators, in all of which exercises, particularly the latter, he became extremely skillful.

"Soon doubtless we shall see thee in the arena," said Pythias mockingly. "When that time comes, have a care to keep thy feet, lest with Nero and his band it shall be a case of 'thumbs down' for Octavia's trusted friend!"

"It might as well be 'thumbs down' as anything else in this lifeless existence," rejoined the tribune despondently. "Jupiter hear me, I am minded to take thine hint seriously and enter the lists: from lack of exercise my muscles are becoming as soft as those of a Sicilian flute-player"—flexing a brawny arm in solemn gravity.

"I know such is becoming the fashion among the patri-cians, but for thee at best it would be a vulgar and foolish resource; instead, why not divert thyself by getting married?" said Pythias demurely. "Quintilla still is darting hawk's-eyes for a mate!"

"Nay," rejoined Marcus with a flash of old-time humor, "the lady still is loyal to Junius, who wrote in his last letter that if much longer thou persist in holding aloof, he is minded to take the matter up with her father."

Pythias had turned away with a scornful toss of the

head, and for the first time in days Marcus experienced a genuine pleasure—in tramping through the heat all the way to the villa to relate the episode to the kindly-smiling Pomponia.

A sudden commotion in the street below roused the tribune from his dreamy reflections. In his efforts to open a way for his charge one of the *anteambulones* of a passing litter had reverted to the use of his elbows when the crowd failed to heed his reiterated cries, “*Date locum dominæ meæ!*” (Make way for my lady!) A sharp thrust under the ear stirred the ire of a hot-headed citizen, who struck back angrily. At the call of their leader the *lecticarii* set down their burden and fell in behind him, the friends of the citizen rallying to the latter’s support, and in a moment pandemonium broke loose.

Two young men who had been staring rudely at the blushing occupant of the litter, started to force their way through the surging mass which encircled the combatants. As the one in advance, who was short, thick-set and prematurely bald, with an unmistakable patrician stamp, turned to shout something at his companion, a misdirected blow at one of the bearers caught him full in the mouth. With a cry of rage he flung himself upon the offender, who, nothing abashed, delivered such vigorous and telling blows that the young patrician fell back gasping, while his companion, holding carefully aloof, cried loudly for help.

“’Tis Nero’s profligates, Otho and that vile Senecio,” muttered the tribune; “the gods grant they are beaten up well.” Then, as the *mêlée* grew hotter, the lust of battle suddenly flamed up in him, with a loud shout he was down the steps in a bound, and striking heavily on either side drove his way through to the litter, the mob falling back in a panic before his savage blows. An instant later the powerful frame of Gallus, the *lanista*, broke through from the other direction, and thus reinforced the panting and

hard-pressed *lecticarii* were able to hold their own until the tardy arrival of the *vigiles* restored order.

"By Hercules," said Otho, wiping away the blood which flowed freely from an ugly cut in his face, "thy coming was most timely, Marcus, and hath put me in thy debt"—his companion, who was rather good-looking but with an air of vulgar subserviency, concurring effusively.

"'Twas nothing but a moment's diversion, Salvius," replied the tribune carelessly. "And in truth thou art under no obligation since in another moment Senecio's valor would have put the rabble to flight"—with a contemptuous glance at the freedman, who flushed angrily.

"His courage is well known," said Otho with a grin, "but of course the odds were heavy. Perchance the lady was a friend of thine?"—looking intently at the departing litter, and gaily waving his hand at the smiling young woman.

"My friends are not of that class," replied Marcus coldly.

"Senecio and I have no such scruples," said the other drily. "And by the goddess of love, if Nero once saw her—it would be *vale* for all her other friends! Knowest thou who she is?"—turning to the *lanista*.

"She is a freedwoman called Acte, noble Salvius," replied Gallus deferentially; "she came to Rome recently—from Greece, as it is said—and although born a slave in Caucasia, is reputed to be wealthy."

Otho's face lighted with triumph: "Hurry Senecio," he cried, "before others catch the scent. Gods! Didst ever see such beauty and charm? Canst hook her for Agrippina's son, when the *imperium* falls to him thou mayst become Pontifex Maximus of the College of Panders—and Marcus Salvius Otho may aspire to the purple!" And with a coarse laugh he hurried away in the direction taken by the litter, the freedman at his heels.

Marcus uttered an imprecation and turning to the *lanista* said angrily:

“’Tis a fine augury for Rome when so foul a project is shamelessly boasted in the very shadow of the palace. Gods! I am minded to follow and upset the game!”

“Come away,” laughingly rejoined Gallus, taking him by the arm. “Thou hast had thy diversion in this thing—let them enjoy theirs and leave the future to the gods. Besides, there is someone expecting us at the *ludus*; I have been searching for thee all the morning.”

The training quarters of the *lanista* were in the Campus Martius, near the great stone amphitheatre of Statilius Taurus. Avoiding the main entrance, Gallus led the way through a blind alley to a door in the rear wall of the building, which he opened with a key and carefully relocked after entering. At the end of a dark passage he unlocked another door and ushered Marcus into a small room, apparently without other opening and having artificial light only. On a couch in the far corner was extended the figure of a man: as he raised himself painfully Marcus recognized the hawk-like but careworn features of the Emperor’s Secretary.

A smile flickered over the pallid countenance of Narcissus as he noted the tribune’s unconcealed surprise. Plainly he was ill and suffering; but his piercing black eyes had lost none of their fire and his voice was strong and resonant as he said to the *lanista* who was withdrawing:

“Stay, Gallus; I know this young man is without fear, but as Octavia’s tribune perchance he may listen less distrustfully to her mother’s enemy, if a tried friend like thyself also shall hear my disclosure.” Then fastening his gaze upon Marcus he proceeded with an apparent candor and ingenuousness which impressed the tribune against his will:

“Thou hast been on guard at one end of the palace to shield the Emperor’s daughter: I at the other to safeguard Cæsar against a dagger stroke in the dark. Because of Messalina, ’tis natural that I should have had

the hatred of her children, and the suspicion of Octavia's trusted friend: whereas always have I recognized the sincerity of thy service and thy unfailing honesty and loyalty. In truth, 'tis because of this latter I have sent for thee. I ask neither pledge, admission nor undertaking on thy part; I make my disclosure because for me the end is in sight—because I trust thee and hate Cæsar's enemies.

“Agrippina knows 'twas I who sent Messalina and her paramour to Hades, and in fear that my continued watchful zeal for Cæsar's honor and safety shall bring about her own deserved punishment, she seeks an opportunity to destroy me. She falsely charged me with the degradation of Britannicus—which she herself compassed. She it was who directed the plot against Silanus in order to force the marriage of Octavia to her graceless son. She hath stolen the imperial power, gotten control of the prætorians and focussed Nero in the eyes of the people as Cæsar's heir. And now the moment approaches when she will strike Claudius as the first Augusta struck Germanicus—expecting to supplant Britannicus with Nero and under cover of his name impose her will upon the Roman world.

“Claudius is doomed. I am too old and infirm longer to successfully intrigue for him, and there is none to take my place. Plautius alone possibly might save him, but he is absent—through her shrewd precaution. And whether it be Britannicus or Nero who succeeds to the purple, I, hated alike by each as the enemy of his false and evil mother, also am bound to fall. But the gods grant Messalina's son shall win, so that he may have revenge on his father's enemies, as well as those of his mother. Octavia hath loyal friends; rally them with thine own in defense of the young prince and his rights. Now go. My life is in thy hands: do with it as thou wilt—and thou save Britannicus”; and before the bewildered Marcus could speak, with a significant gesture to the attentive

Gallus, Narcissus lifted a curtain and disappeared through the doorway it concealed.

"Come quickly," said the *lanista*: "I must help him through the underground passage. Meet me at old Bulla's tonight: I will be there with Callinus about the third hour"; and the door into the alley closed behind the departing tribune, whose quick step and alert bearing were in striking contrast with the inertia displayed in his aimless descent from the Palatine a few hours earlier.

Everything Narcissus had asserted about Agrippina was known—or at least suspected—by him except the Augusta's alleged determination to assassinate the Emperor and destroy the Secretary. For the latter personally he had no concern; but crafty, selfish and unscrupulous as Narcissus was, Marcus recognized his real devotion to the Emperor, who would be entirely at the mercy of Agrippina and her tools if the Secretary were removed.

He realized perfectly that Narcissus was seeking to enlist him in a counterplot which presumably already was under way. While for Octavia and her brother he would not have hesitated an instant to expose his life and fortunes in such a venture, the hopelessness of any attempt to save Claudius had been tacitly admitted by the Secretary, the manifest limit of whose aim was to defeat the Augusta through the elevation of Britannicus. But the latter was only an immature boy and, as the tribune was convinced, only through the Emperor's unhampered power and influence could the son's rights be conserved: the death of Claudius at that time inevitably would result in the downfall of Britannicus. There was but one way—and Narcissus himself had pointed it out in his laconic admission that Aulus Plautius was the only person who could save the Emperor. And thus Marcus went straight to Pomponia with his story.

The matron shared all the tribune's alarm and agreed unreservedly in his conclusion. And to avoid the risk of

both delay and discovery which would attend transmission of a letter, it was quickly decided that Marcus himself should bear word to the General. Pomponia at once went to Octavia, and with care to avoid arousing her suspicion or anxiety, after procuring leave of absence for the tribune to take a message to Aulus, led the conversation to Britannicus, suggesting that if possible he should be brought more frequently in contact with his father and sister. The latter in a torrent of self-reproach admitted that in the indulgence of her own grief she had been selfishly unmindful of her brother, declaring that she would at once interpose in his behalf with her father and thereafter devote all her spare hours to his welfare.

Thus on the evening when Gallus and his companion were expecting him at the wine shop, Marcus with a small escort was on his way to the Danube, his disquietude about the imperial family lessened as much through the exhilaration of active service as by Pomponia's hopeful assurance after her visit to the palace. Fortunately for the peace of mind of both, neither could foresee that the catastrophe was to be hastened by the very precautions they had taken to avoid it.

Claudius received his daughter with an unusual display of affection, and in a burst of maudlin weakness confessed his fear of Agrippina; passionately declaring that he was "fated to bear the iniquities of his wives and then punish them"; that it was the Empress alone who had kept him apart from his son, that he would tolerate it no longer—Britannicus should come to him forthwith and be restored to his rightful place in the palace. "I will give him the manly gown at once," he cried, "that the Roman people may have a real, instead of an adoptive Cæsar!"

When the ubiquitous eavesdropper reported the Emperor's words to Agrippina she decided to take the last step. Indeed, the time was not unpropitious. Many evil portents had been observed. There had been earthquakes, followed by a failure of crops. First a swarm of bees,

then birds of evil omen had settled on the Capitol. A pig had been farrowed with the talons of a hawk. Following a rain of blood the doors of the temple of Jupiter opened by themselves. A bolt of lightning struck the standard of the prætorians. Death had occurred successively in each of the five orders of the magistrates. And as if all these did not sufficiently presage some great National calamity, a blazing comet appeared—invariably regarded as a portent of the death of a ruler.

Claudius was taken violently ill after partaking of a dish of mushrooms, of which he was inordinately fond. For some reason the poison, which had been prepared by a noted woman criminal named Locusta, and administered by Halotus, the head eunuch, did not work effectively; whereupon the physician Zenophon, another of the Augusta's tools, consummated the evil deed by inserting in the unconscious man's throat a feather smeared with a more deadly poison.

But since at the precise moment the omens were unpropitious the Emperor's death was concealed. Expressing hope that Claudius would rally, although feigning to be overpowered by anxiety and grief, Agrippina detained Octavia and Britannicus in the imperial apartments, all the approaches to which were carefully guarded. The Senate was convened in order that the pontiffs and magistrates might offer vows for Cæsar's recovery.

At last on the third day before the Ides of October the gates were thrown open and announcement was made to the waiting throng that Claudius was dead. Then Nero appeared, and at a sign from the prefect Burrhus the attending cohort raised a mighty shout for the young Germanicus. He was placed in a litter, borne to the Camp, and after a flattering speech to the prætorians saluted as Emperor.

There had been a few feeble cries for Britannicus, but Octavia did not deceive herself; she knew the voice of the prætorians was potent, and her tears flowed despite her-

self as she sadly but proudly withdrew with the angry and disconsolate young prince.

The Senate promptly followed the lead of the soldiers. By a second decree divine honors were accorded Claudius, who was enrolled among the deities: upon learning of which Nero said laughingly to Otho:

“Hereafter mushrooms should be known by their Greek name, ‘Food of the Gods’—since through partaking my uncle has become a god!”

When Marcus arrived at the post on the Danube he was disappointed to learn that Plautius was away on a tour of inspection in the west, Varus attending him. Five days later, while still impatiently awaiting the General’s return, came a fast-riding courier from Rome with news of the Emperor’s death and the proclaiming of Nero. Chagrined at the failure of his mission, vaguely alarmed about Octavia and her brother, and bitterly reproaching himself for disregarding the advice of Narcissus, after entrusting letters for the General and Junius to the former’s confidential servant, the tribune set out for Rome under forced marches.

THE ARTS OF LOCUSTA

THE acquisition of arbitrary power operates as a most searching test of character, in the stress of which so many of those who attain high place afterwards fail ignominiously. But Agrippina was not lacking in counterpoise, and the triumphant success of her long-nurtured plan led this remarkable woman into no display of weakness nor induced neglect in safeguarding her accomplishment.

She regarded the late Emperor's Secretary and Marcus Junius Silanus, brother of Octavia's betrothed, as the most probable sources of immediate danger. Narcissus was rigorously imprisoned, and weighed down by age and infirmities committed suicide. No chances were taken with Silanus, a man of high character, and in the same degree of relationship to the first emperor as Nero: he was promptly removed by poison. The coldly-calculating Augusta recognized her own son as the only remaining menace to complete realization of her ultimate ambition—exercise by herself of the sovereign power under the nominal rule of Nero.

Years before when told by an astrologer that her son would reign but would kill his mother, she calmly rejoined, "Let him kill me so that he reign." But although in her inflexible will and dauntless courage may be found every assurance that her remark was no vaunting pretense, in all imperious natures ambitions enlarge with each attainment. And Agrippina was not one supinely to accept any mere forecast of an adverse decree of the Fates.

To the tribune who, in accordance with military usage, applied to him for the watchword, the newly-made Cæsar in the exuberance of his joy had given "The Best of Mothers." And for the time being, immersed in dissolute pleasures, he willingly resigned the powers as well as the burdens of State to the one who so skillfully had elevated him to the highest place in the Roman world. But it was none the less clear to his mother's penetrating intellect that sooner or later her domination of the boy Emperor would be challenged by him, and she prepared for the inevitable contest with her son as remorselessly and unscrupulously as she had plotted and striven in his behalf.

Aware that at heart Nero was an abject coward, she considered that he could be held in subjection the more readily through fear than by appeal either to gratitude, duty or reason: and while resolving to hold off the inevitable struggle for supremacy as long as possible, she decided that when the situation should become acute her most efficient weapon would be to awaken and keep alive in her son's mind a wholesome dread of the rights and pretensions of Britannicus. With characteristic promptitude she began her preparation without a moment's delay.

"Now that vile Secretary hath made away with himself," she said to Octavia, "all thy brother's troubles are at an end. Narcissus alone it was who influenced thy father against his son. Although Cæsar himself may have declared otherwise, 'tis well known that when inflamed by wine he spake wildly and as false intimates prompted him. Thou knowest the boy's dislike and distrust of me: be it thy part to rehabilitate him and shape his life as befits the son of Claudius. Choose thou his tutors and attendants, and if he will not bend to Nero, at least persuade him that I am and always have been his friend and would-be helper."

Under her crafty stepmother's gracious words and sympathetic bearing all of Octavia's vague doubts and suspicions took flight and gladly she assumed the welcome

task entrusted to her. The heavy pall which had settled down upon her own path lifted a little, in the self-forgetfulness of her ardent efforts to lead Britannicus out of the mire of his own despondency.

But her youthful brother's spirit was well-nigh broken. The injustice against which his childish soul had chafed, the indignities and ill-treatment to which he had been subjected, the estrangement of his father, followed by the latter's death in the moment of reconciliation, and the preferment of the hated and despised Nero, had robbed him of his one-time buoyancy and joyous disposition. Responding momentarily to his sister's fond ministrations, invariably he would relapse into his former state of melancholy and depression, from which even the quips and sallies of the vivacious Pythias and the virile incitements of Marcus failed to arouse him.

"I can do nothing for him," said Octavia dolefully, on an occasion when she had left him brooding at the palace, after moodily refusing to go with her to the villa. "He seems to have lost his pride even. They have broken his heart," and her eyes filled with tears.

"With the young that is not easily done, my dear," said Pomponia soothingly. "I know he hath suffered grievously, and the scourge hath cut deep: but be not discouraged—Time is a great healer."

But Time was not long for Britannicus. For him the Spinner had completed her task, and above the thread of his life the lethal weapon of "The Inflexible" already was poised to cut the strand which the other imperturbable sister was fast drawing to its end.

The festival of the Saturnalia was at hand—in early Roman times that annual period of universal joy, mirth and goodfellowship which in many of its secular aspects seems like a prototype of the modern Christmas-tide observed in the spirit of the immortal "Christmas Carol"; a time "when men and women by one consent open their shut-up hearts freely and think of other people as if

really fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.”

During the festival no battle might be fought, nor war declared, nor punishment of any sort inflicted. The schools, public offices and courts were closed and no business was transacted. Distinctions of rank were laid aside, slaves sat at table with their masters, the utmost freedom of speech was permitted and gifts were exchanged by all classes.

As established by Augustus the festival began on the fifteenth day before the Kalends of January and lasted four days. The seventeenth and eighteenth days of December were devoted to Saturn, the two following were sacred to Ops, the goddess of plenty and fertility. The tender-hearted and benevolent Caligula added a fifth day—the *dies juvenatus*, given over to the sports of the young; and in popular usage frequently the festivities were continued two days more.

Rome entered upon the present celebration in a particularly happy frame of mind. The harvests had been abundant, the imperial gifts generous, the armies everywhere triumphant and the weather was fine. The fearsome portents of the autumn apparently had exhausted their malevolence in the death of Claudius, never popular and already forgotten. During the two months which had elapsed since the gods had taken him the people had basked in the sunshine of unbroken tranquillity—the lively, pleasure-loving and freehanded boy-Emperor daily increasing in popularity under the shrewdly tolerant administration of public affairs by his mother, wisely guided by Seneca and the prefect Burrhus.

Thus during the first four days the religious observances and the various festivities respectively had been observed and enjoyed with unusual fervor. In his temple at the foot of the Capitoline ascent, the woolen fetters had been duly removed from the feet of the image of Saturn, to whom the traditional offering of a pig had been made

by all well-to-do citizens. The sacrifices had been made with uncovered head. In their obeisance to the deity's wife all had stooped and touched the earth, in recognition of her additional sovereignty over the world below. Clad in flowing *syntheses*, the toga having been laid aside, and everyone, including the slaves, wearing the *pilleus*, a little round felt cap, fitting close to the temple, an emblem of liberty, immense crowds had thronged the streets from daylight until dark shouting, *Io Saturnalia!* Advantage had been taken freely of the temporary suspension of all edicts against gambling with dice; and feasting, mirth, and every sort of light-hearted gaiety and diversion generally indulged in. And now on the evening of the fifth day, after attendance at the customary fair held by the makers of clay dolls, which with waxen tapers were the commonest gifts of the season, a large assemblage had gathered at the palace to witness the final merrymaking and amusements of the youthful element.

The closing event had been arranged by Nero, already beginning to disclose in embryo his vain and flaunting play-actor proclivities. Under the direction of a king, to be chosen by lot, impromptu performances of various kinds were to be staged by those called upon by their make-believe overlord. Nero condescendingly laid aside his purple robes, and clad in the toga of youth, became one of the participants. Of course he drew the lucky number—since his vanity could not have endured a subordinate part.

The son of Ahenobarbus never had forgotten the contemptuous refusal of Britannicus to acknowledge his adoptive name. Naturally, also, the brother beloved by Octavia shared in the contempt and aversion in which she was held by her husband. And finally, through the very fact of the injustice which as presumptive heir to the purple he had suffered at the hands of Nero, to the latter the young Claudius had become an object of jealous enmity. To publicly shame and humiliate his stepbrother

was a cherished part of the "make-believe" king's programme.

After a number of those of his own age had been called upon for various performances in which respectively they were known to be proficient, and consequently acquitted themselves with credit, as midnight approached Nero announced with a flourish that in the final number the audience was to enjoy the rare treat of listening to a real artist—and with a malicious smile directed Britannicus to sing a classic measure.

Without the slightest hesitation or noticeable embarrassment the son of Claudius advanced to the center and with perfect self-possession, in a clear full voice, recited with deep feeling the passage on Priam's downfall from *Andromache*, one of the tragedies of Ennius, in which another prince bewailed the loss of his kingdom and inheritance.

Nero was dumbfounded. That this callow youth, unaccustomed to social assemblies, whose education had been so sedulously neglected, should bear himself with so much composure, and on the spur of the moment recite so faultlessly from and so feelingly interpret a classical composition of the father of Roman poetry, outraged his own inordinate and shallow vanity: the fact that his cunning plan for his stepbrother's embarrassment and mortification had failed was far less exasperating. In the throes of this mean and childish emotion, for the moment the full significance of what had occurred was overlooked. But the parallel between the unfortunate Astyanax mourning for Hector, and the supplanted son of the murdered Claudius lamenting his own wrongs, had been too obvious—even if the undertone of sympathy which ran through the applause of the spectators had not speedily brought the truth home to him. In a great rage, with a petulant gesture he brought the affair to an end and abruptly left the room; while the audience broke up in excitement, still loudly praising Britannicus, for whom

some expressions of unreserved sympathy were distinctly audible.

Agrippina had witnessed the occurrence and noted its effect upon her son with grim satisfaction. It could not have happened more opportunely, nor could she have devised anything to pave the way more effectively for what she had in contemplation. Otho was as ambitious as he was unscrupulous, and she rightly attributed much of Nero's extravagant conduct and disregard of dignity to the ascendancy of the unprincipled young patrician. The latter had carried out his plan in regard to Acte, and Nero had surrendered completely to the fascinations of the good-natured and charming little Asiatic freedwoman. At first the *liaison* had been skillfully concealed with the aid of an obliging friend, who posed as Acte's real protector and the donor of the rich gifts showered upon her by Nero. But the latter's infatuation was too great long to escape the wary eye of the Augusta: and only that morning Agrippina had been shocked to learn that during a drunken revel at Otho's the night previous her son had brazenly declared his intention to divorce Octavia and espouse Acte.

Filled with indignation at the thought of a freedwoman becoming her daughter-in-law, she resolved to discipline her son without delay.

"Another time," she said to him caustically on the morning after the affair at the palace, "mayhap thou wilt take council of thy mother before allowing thy low companions to lead thee into so great a blunder. Clumsily was it done—none having been in doubt as to thy real purpose. Instead of becoming an object of ridicule and derision, Britannicus hath shown himself thy superior as an artist, and at the same time awakened the sympathy of the patricians. If, as is probable, he hath a party behind him, thou hast played directly into their hands. It should be easy for them to rouse the populace and win

over the prætorians from the adoptive to the real son of Claudius, if after thus attempting to shame Britannicus thou shouldst publicly flout the popular Octavia." Then she upbraided him mercilessly with his passion for the freedwoman, concluding with a veiled threat that unless he changed his conduct she herself might feel called upon to espouse the cause of Britannicus.

Almost beside himself with anger and fear, Nero was barely able to muster self-control enough to accept his castigation with pretended humility—whereupon Agrippina changed her tone. She urged him to cast off Otho and Senecio, to abandon Acte, to make every effort to placate Octavia, and to discomfit his enemies by making a friend of Britannicus, whose pretensions thus might become a source of strength instead of danger.

Nero listened with sullen anger, which almost blazed out at the reference to Acte. But his mother's dominance was yet too powerful, and the terror inspired by her thinly-veiled menaces acted like a wet blanket upon the flames of his resentment. Unable to hide his fears, he managed to dissemble his other emotions, and in a torrent of self-reproach begged his mother's forgiveness, promising compliance with her wishes in such apparent sincerity that the Augusta withdrew abundantly satisfied with the result of her experiment.

But for the first time in the long game of Hazard which theretofore she had played with such consummate skill, Agrippina had made a fatal blunder. The dormant brute and feral instincts of her degenerate son had been lashed into activity—and the display was of a sort which might be expected from an aroused and treacherous beast.

If any further goad had been necessary it would have been found in the rejoinder of Otho (who returned Agrippina's dislike in full measure) to his recital of the maternal reproaches and threats—that he should "beware of treachery in a woman habitually daring and now acting

under a mask." With a savage imprecation he declared he would destroy his mother's power to injure him, assert his independence, and enjoy his revenge at a single blow.

Agrippina herself had pointed out the way, and the agency through which she had effected the removal of Claudius was still available. The woman Locusta, under sentence for poisoning, had not yet suffered punishment—as it was maliciously whispered, having been respited for the possible future requirements of the imperial family. Through Pollio, tribune of the cohort which had the sorceress in charge, she was induced to compound a poison the effects of which Nero was assured would be instantaneous.

But in this matter he would take nothing for granted. After the mischance on the night of the *dies juvenatus* he resolved to play only with loaded dice. Accordingly he had declared to Pollio that the efficacy of the compound must be demonstrated before he would accept it, adding coldly, "And by the *manes* of my ancestors, if the test fails, there will occur a vacancy in thy command and Locusta also will go down to Hades." In a room adjoining that of the Emperor the test was made to Nero's entire satisfaction; and Pollio departed with no cause to complain of Cæsar's liberality, also bearing assurances to Locusta that she had taken a long step in the direction of a pardon.

To effect his purpose secretly would have been a simple matter; but a procedure so commonplace did not appeal to the artistic temperament and cravings for the dramatic of Agrippina's son. Moreover, the mere death of his enemy would be a tasteless revenge; his essentially cruel nature exacted that the deed should be consummated publicly, in a manner to impose the greatest possible suffering upon those he desired to punish and to impress most forcibly with his power the ones he purposed to humiliate. In the refined and malignant cruelty of this first of his crimes, as now jubilantly planned, is discernible the dis-

tinctive quality of those later atrocities which have made his name infamous—of which the manifest design was that the sufferings of the victims should occasion the maximum of anguish to their friends.

NERO BREAKS HIS CHAINS

THE splendid triclinium of the palace was aglow with the mellow light from innumerable candelabra and myriads of lamps suspended from the ceiling. The air, tempered to a genial warmth by the gleaming braziers, was redolent with the odors of delicately blended perfumes. The arches and marble columns were festooned and draped with shining green, and from the fragrant obscurity of the alcoves, massed with flowering shrubs, soft music flooded the room with languorous melody.

Upon a dais at the upper end of the great hall, attired in a *synthesis* of white, bordered with the imperial color, his mop of reddish curls wreathed with laurel, Nero reclined on an ivory couch spread with Tyrian purple. Agrippina and Octavia, crowned with roses, and each wearing a rose-colored *stola*, banded with purple and ornamented at the neck with gold, sat in low-backed, cushioned chairs at either end of the imperial *lectus*. On a slightly lower level than that of the dais, and flanking it on either side in a circular form the men and women intimates and friends of the youthful Cæsar and his mother, clad in gaily colored *syntheses* and *stolæ*, with Seneca, Burrhus and certain of the magistrates, likewise in gala attire, respectively reclined upon the couches and occupied the adjoining chairs. Under the direction of the *tricliniarcha* an army of well-trained and softly-moving slaves was busily engaged in serving the dainty dishes, presenting alabaster bowls of rose water and perfumed napkins for the necessary ablutions between courses, re-

arranging the pillows and cushions, and such minor services as conduced to the ease and comfort of the guests.

Nero was in rare good humor. Indeed, since the memorable interview with his mother he had been habitually gracious and considerate to his friends and subordinates alike and, as Agrippina was forced to admit, his conduct in other respects had been most exemplary. In fact he had more than fulfilled his promises. On the day after the Saturnalia Acte left Rome for Baiæ with a company of gay young roisterers, including Otho and Senecio. The latter had just returned with the report that tired of the frivolities of the watering-place the fair freedwoman with Annæus Serenus, the friend of Seneca who had originally posed as Acte's protector, accompanied them on their return journey as far as Capua, where they had taken the road to Brundisium, intending to embark for Athens.

To his mother the repentant boy-Emperor had been notably affectionate and deferential, loading her with gifts of rich vestments and costly jewels, and consulting her daily upon affairs of importance. He had made brotherly overtures to Britannicus, freely praising his fine rendition at the palace; and so far as Octavia's cold reserve permitted, had evinced a friendly and companionable disposition. Turning his back upon all the gay and dissolute pleasures to which theretofore he had devoted himself, he daily sought the companionship of Seneca, conferred gravely with the magistrates, and made frequent visits to the camp, where he affiliated with the prætorians and discussed martial and disciplinary affairs with Burrhus. Finally, in his eager efforts to please Octavia and conciliate Britannicus, he insisted that the latter, with a few companions of his own age and rank, should attend the present banquet. In accordance with custom they were sitting by themselves at a modestly furnished table directly in front of the imperial party.

Agrippina had observed this apparent reformation with a mixture of satisfaction, surprise and suspicion—

in the end the latter predominating. And tonight especially, with an instinctive feeling that some *dénouement* was impending which would supply a key to the enigma, she was studying her son with furtive curiosity.

Octavia, on the other hand, was in a state of complacency to which she had long been a stranger. Her attention was centered on the table where her brother and his companions were enjoying their repast with youthful zest and merriment. At last Britannicus was climbing up into the sunlight. The loving solicitude of his sister, the patient labors of Pythias and Marcus, the maternal encouragement of Pomponia, and continuous association with congenial tutors, had won the day. Restored to his rightful place in the imperial household, and the society of his equals, his natural exuberance of spirit began to reassert itself, and his proud yet affable bearing and cheerful mirth caused his sister's heart to throb with subdued happiness. Grateful to Nero for his part in the result, she responded to her husband's occasional remarks with so much warmth that Agrippina stared in frowning perplexity.

Custom prescribed that among the personal attendants of a recognized heir-apparent of the imperial family, as well as to Cæsar himself, a *prægustator* should be included. The duty of this special officer was to taste in advance everything presented his master to eat or drink. One of the most trusted attendants of Claudius had been chosen by Octavia for this important service to her brother.

A cup of wine diluted with hot water, after being tested by the fore-taster, was handed Britannicus. It proved too hot, and in the cold water which was added Locusta's poison found its way into the drink. Joining in the loud laughter which greeted a humorous anecdote he had related, Britannicus took a generous draught of the mixture. A shudder ran over him and the cup fell from his hand as half-rising, with contorted features and wildly

rolling eyes, he vainly tried to cry out; then dropping back limply upon his chair the upper part of his body sprawled forward upon the table, from which some dishes clattered to the floor.

Instantly the hum of conversation ceased and a great hush fell upon the assemblage, while every eye was fixed upon the inert figure which some terrified attendants were supporting. Agrippina sat like a marble figure, her stony gaze fixed upon the recumbent figure of her smilingly unconcerned son. Octavia, ashen pale, had risen with a little cry of alarm; but Nero with a careless wave of the hand assured her that there was no cause for alarm, that he himself used to be similarly affected by too generous indulgence in hot water and wine, and that Britannicus would soon regain his senses—all of which he reiterated in a loud voice to allay the increasing excitement and alarm.

With a gasp of momentary relief Octavia sank back upon the cushions. Her gaze anxiously riveted on those who were bearing the inanimate form of her brother toward an exit at the lower end of the room, she did not observe Nero's leer of triumph as he turned to Agrippina, nor hear his malevolent whisper, "And now when thou art minded to join the party of Britannicus, methinks thou must follow down into Hades to find the protagonist of the play!"

The enigma was solved, the mask had fallen from his face, and Agrippina apprehended that the parting of the ways had been reached. She had been to the Oracle and, knowing herself, clearly foresaw the inevitable life and death struggle which impended, with the chances in favor of her son—if only because she could not forget that he was her son.

She realized that Nero had broken his chains; that if in this first exercise of his new-found power he were allowed to go free, no bars could be devised strong enough to restrain him again. But how to reclaim him, for the moment at least surpassed the bounds even of her un-

rivalled resourcefulness. Perhaps one word to Burrhus, if spoken on the instant, would accomplish it: but effected in such a way it would mean the end of Nero. "Let him kill me so that he reign," she had replied to the astrologer. No, she would fight the Fates to the bitter end—but with her own weapons, in her own way and for her own aims: she wished to defeat but not destroy her son.

In this finality of her determination she met Nero's taunting glances so resolutely and her eyes burned with such concentrated fury that even in the full flush of victory and conscious emancipation, he was unable to withstand her gaze, and recoiled with something of the old fear and feeling of subjection.

But it was only a passing shadow. The beast had found its strength and gained its freedom. Momentarily he might quail before his former keeper's eye—but at the first threat of the lash he would leap!

Rising to his feet with a curse, after harshly commanding the *tricliniarcha* to "send those snivelling boys home to bed and remove their table," he directed that wine should be served and the entertainment proceed: and when Octavia preferred a whispered request that she be permitted to withdraw and go to Britannicus, with a foul imprecation he bade her keep her seat until Cæsar should dismiss his guests. All the proud and militant spirit of her race rose in rebellion, and she was restrained from open defiance of her husband's brutality only by an appealing glance from Agrippina, supplemented by the cautious whisper of Marcus, standing behind her chair, that he would go at once and bring her news.

But the tribune did not return, and during the long hours which followed, torn with anxiety and mounting fears, Octavia drooped in sombre isolation, while with few other exceptions Nero's guests abandoned themselves to the usual extravagant revelry of a palace dinner.

In the now empty space where the tragedy had been enacted all sorts of performances were staged in lively

succession. The elaborate program which had been arranged included some things to satisfy the most variant tastes—from the low ribaldry of the *scurræ* and *moriones* to finished recitations from the Greek poets and tragedians and their Roman imitators. Between these extremes were the displays and antics of wrestlers, jugglers and rope-dancers; elaborate pantomimic representations of dramatic subjects by dancing and rhythmic gesticulation; a vulgar and commonplace little comedy composed by Nero himself, in applauding which none was louder than the shallow-minded author: mimetic and bacchanal dancing by scantily-clad girls, and even a splendid pyrrhic dance, ordinarily reserved for the public games—the necessary pauses for changes of mask and costume and the intervals between numbers enlivened by resonant *symphonia* of both vocal and instrumental music.

As the entertainment progressed, under the insistent commands of Cæsar, the wine circulated more and more freely until some of the revellers, after passing through the various phases of intoxication, fell asleep on the couches, or upon the shoulders of their fair companions, many of the latter quite as far lost to self-control as the men.

Nero himself was very drunk, but through a fortunate *contretemps* he did not get beyond the good-natured stage of inebriety. After a particularly unreserved dance by a group of abandoned women in diaphanous attire he commanded that the leader be brought to the dais. Removing his laurel wreath he placed it upon the dishevelled locks of the dancer and fastening a gold chain about her neck, completed her embarrassment by declaring ostentatiously, “ ’Tis in token of thy new servitude; thou shalt remain at the palace”—with a drunken leer at the coldly indifferent Octavia, Agrippina regarding him with unconcealed scorn and anger.

A little later, after draining a goblet of fiery Setinian at a single gulp, with a vacuous smile he announced in a

thick voice the reading of some verses he had jotted down during the evening and purposed dedicating to the "lamented Britannicus." Staggering across the dais, tablets in hand, he stumbled on the first step and fell headlong to the floor below, where he lay apparently as devoid of life as that other figure which a few hours earlier had collapsed on the same spot.

"Cæsar is making a belated obeisance to the goddess of fertility," shouted a stentorian voice; at which roars of derisive laughter, punctuated by ribald and indecent jests, ran along the tables and a scene of wild confusion ensued. Many of the attendants fled in terror, but at a sharp command from Agrippina a few of the more courageous, under direction of the major-domo, ventured to lift the insensible form of divine Cæsar to the cushioned couch, which thereupon was borne from the room upon the shoulders of half a dozen sturdy slaves. Accepting this unusual proceeding as a sort of vicarious dismissal, none the less potent because unintentional, the guests departed in great disorder, not forgetting however the customary farewell of "*Io Imperator!*"—in which all united in a frenzy of drunken sarcasm.

Accompanied by one of her women, Octavia ran to her brother's apartments in the other wing of the palace. Without a word to the tribune, standing in soldierly attention at the door, his countenance fixed and stern, she darted into the room and saw the unattended body of Britannicus stretched out upon the bed. With clenched hands pressed against her heaving bosom, she hung over him, gazing in horror at his distorted features and wide-staring eyes; then with a low, despairing cry her knees gave way, and groping blindly for the dead boy's hand she fell in a swoon.

An instant later Agrippina glided through the doorway. Without a glance at the stark figure on the bed, she bent over the prostrate girl, tenderly lifting her head

and summoning Marcus to assist in raising her to a couch.

Chafing Octavia's temples and wrists with water brought by the terrified maid, while awaiting the return of consciousness what phantoms of the past must have obtruded upon her brooding reminiscence! The spectres of her own father and mother, of her sister Julia, of Caligula, her brother, of Passienus her second husband, of Claudius, Narcissus, and Lepida, her husband's sister; of Octavia's first betrothed and his brother Marcus Junius—and finally of her stepson, the last prince of the proud Claudian line—all sent to their death by violence, most of them by poison and the major number by her own hand! And now the son for whose advancement and glory she has prostituted herself—her rich gifts, her splendid intellect and all her lofty inheritance—had begun to use the same base weapon in the lust for power and revenge. Again the words of the astrologer flamed out of the past, and in the shadowy future she visioned her own fate at the hands of the raging beast she had nourished.

Fluttering back to unwelcome consciousness Octavia shrank affrighted from the white-robed woman, with set features and brooding eyes sitting motionless beside her. But as the other relaxed and bent over her with unaffected sympathy, whispering words of tenderness and compassion, she threw herself into Agrippina's arms and gave way to a flood of bitter passionate weeping.

Nero was a true son of his mother. His first important affair had been carried out as planned—with the most precise attention to details. Moreover, he was a consummate artist—considering the epilogue as of slightly if any less importance than the drama itself. Accordingly everything pertaining to the funeral of Britannicus had been carefully arranged in advance of his unexpected death, on the day following which the obsequies were held.

Through a heavy downpour of rain the funeral proces-

sion wound its way down from the Palatine and passing through the city slowly traversed the Flaminian Way to the huge mausoleum of Augustus, in its setting of sombre cypress, which yet rears its craggy, moss-covered walls in the ancient Campus Martius, not far from Father Tiber's turbid flow.

Upon the marble pavement of the *ustrium*, the sacred enclosure for cremation of the imperial dead, the *lectica funebris*, with its purple and gold embroidered coverlets, upon which the body rested, was set down to await the last simple rites.

In her vestments of pure white, which under the Emperors had taken the place of sombre black as the proper mourning attire for women, Octavia stood beside the bier—so calm, so motionless, so absolutely immobile, that she might have been the marble product of some genius of the block and chisel, who at last had succeeded in the endless search for the Absolute and immortalized himself in the creation of an image animated by a living soul. Not a sigh escaped her pallid lips; not the faintest quiver of a recreant muscle disclosed itself in the ivory face; not a fleck of moisture dimmed the full dark eyes—only the rhythmic rise and fall of her bosom marked the insuperable barrier between the highest achievement of the sculptor's art and the miracle of God.

At a signal from the *designator* that all was in readiness the beautiful head bent slowly in bestowal of the final kiss upon her brother's brow. Then buried under the garlands and wreaths which were showered lavishly upon it, the body was laid upon the funeral pyre; and, as the nearest living relative, averting her face in observance of the ancient custom, with unfaltering hand Octavia set a torch to the pitch-covered combustibles at the base of the pyre.

Unmoved by the loud lamentations of the *præficæ*, the sobs of Pythias, the quiet grief of the sad-faced Pomponia, who alone among the women was clothed in black, and the

unobtrusive sympathy of Marcus, with calm, incurious gaze she watched the fire blaze up in whirlwinds of flame, in the consuming greed of which the body of Britannicus disappeared forever.

When the pile was burned to the bottom of the furnace the glowing embers were quenched with wine, the *manes* of the departed invoked, the bones and ashes gathered up in the mourning robe, sprinkled in turn with wine and milk, and, after intermixture with perfumes and unguents finally assembled in an alabaster vase for consignment to the tomb which had been opened for its reception.

Close at hand were to be seen the *cippi* which marked the several compartments in the immense mortuary chamber, respectively consecrated to the *manes* of those other members of the imperial family who had preceded Britannicus to the world below. The marble bases, upon which graceful columns rested, were severally inscribed with the names of the first Emperor; of Livia, his wife; his great Minister, the builder of the matchless Pantheon; his favorite nephew, the young Marcellus, of whom Virgil writes so beautifully; his beautiful and accomplished sister, the second wife of Antony; and of those unhappy youths, Gaius and Lucius Cæsar. Also might be read the names of Tiberius, of his martial brother, his wife Antonia and their son, the younger Drusus; of the idolized Germanicus and the intrepid Agrippina Major, the four brothers and sisters of Caligula, and finally of the last Emperor. For the most part unnoticed and unwept, there all these reposed—although not for all time as the builder of the mighty tomb had fondly dreamed, but only until, after the lapse of a few fleeting centuries, their ashes should be flung to the winds by Alaric's brutal horde in their disappointed violation of the tombs in quest of gold.

The inhumation thus completed, in full clear tones Octavia repeated the last farewell in the well known formulæ: "*Ave anima candida; terra tibi levis sit; molliter cubent ossa*" (Hail, thou shining spirit! May the under-

world be gracious to thee—May thy body repose in peace!). Then with a last eloquent look at the marble tomb, followed closely by the impassive Marcus and herself supporting the softly-weeping Pythias, she led the way out into the still-raging storm. Not once in all the humiliations, misery and anguish of the years to come did she ever weep again: the flames which consumed the body of Britannicus had forever dried up the sources of her tears.

The obsequies had taken place during such a dreadful storm that the superstitious populace considered the wrath of the elements as a denunciation by the gods of both Cæsar's foul deed and the indecent haste of the funeral. But for this emergency also Nero was prepared. He declared in an edict:

"It is an institution of our ancestors to withdraw from sight the bodies of such as die prematurely, and not lengthen the ceremony and processions. For the rest, having in Britannicus lost the support of a brother, I now rest all my hopes in the commonwealth; and hence with greater tenderness ought the Senate and people to cherish the prince, who now alone survives of a family born to the sovereignty."

And then, as the historian of the times concludes with that covert, delicate sarcasm in the use of which he was preëminent: "He bestowed additional presents upon his most confidential friends"—the gifts consisting of the estates of Britannicus!

THE RETURN OF SPRING

AFTER the period of enforced abstinence preceding the death of Britannicus, with sharpened appetite Nero reverted to his former gay and irresponsible life. Acte reappeared immediately: as prearranged, instead of taking the road to the coast, she had secluded herself at Capua until the arrival of a courier with the expected message to return to Rome. There being no further occasion for subterfuge, she was installed openly in the palace, where the event was celebrated with an all-night carousal.

But it quickly became apparent to the watchful Agrippina that if ever there had been any danger of a more formal relation between her son and the engaging little freedwoman, it had vanished. Although deeply infatuated with Acte, Nero made it plain that he regarded her only as a favorite plaything. But while in due time discarded with other youthful fancies, it is a curious fact that not only was she the only one among even his closest intimates to escape the lash of the mad Emperor's ruthless cruelty and malice, but until the very end of his ruthless career she remained the object of his unvarying kindness and protection. And it is scarcely less noteworthy that, always unpretentiously devoted to her imperial lover, to whom she remained faithful even after Poppæa supplanted her, Acte was the only one to pay the last pious offices to his mortal remains after he in turn had been abandoned by all the world.

Other than the dismissal of Pallas, the Treasurer, regarded by him as the most dangerous of Agrippina's abettors, Nero undertook no further reprisals; and for

the time being between mother and son a tacit truce existed. While the halcyon days of the "Beloved son" and "The Best of Mothers" had gone forever, under a pretense of mutual respect and coöperation the administration of public affairs proceeded for the most part as formerly.

It was different as to Octavia. Secluding herself in her own compartments, she never saw her husband except in such public exigencies as the wife of Cæsar might not disregard. And even on these rare occasions, so far as any manifest recognition of his presence was concerned, she might as well have been at the other end of the imperial domain.

Mercifully ignorant of the leading part which Agrippina had taken in the destruction of her happiness, and aware of the breach between mother and son, to which in her innocence she ascribed no deeper cause than Agrippina's abhorrence of Nero's dreadful deed, her heart was stirred the more deeply by her stepmother's display of real feeling and the compassionate sympathy of which she had been the recipient. But in this, as in every other important stage of their relations, for some inexplicable reason there was a line she was never able to cross in attempting those unreserved confidences to which often she was prompted. This indefinable barrier between them never disappeared—despite the fact that from the hour of that vigil in the death chamber of Britannicus down to the moment when its fateful visions were realized in the tragedy of her ghastly end, Agrippina cherished for her stepdaughter only those feelings and emotions which are grounded in womanly sincerity, purity and truth; for the expression of which, indeed, her relations with Octavia constituted the solitary outlet during all the years of her evil, misguided life.

The weeks following the funeral in the Campus Martius were the loneliest and most desolate of Octavia's life. The

shock of her brother's dreadful death, at the very dawn of his new-found hope, seemed to have destroyed in her not only all sensibility but even the primal desire to live.

"'Tis not alone her sufferings and my own impotency that harrow me," said Pythias dolefully to the sympathetic tribune, "but the racking fear that in some moment of blind despair she will plunge headlong into the Stygian abyss."

"I am not sure that would be the greater evil," Marcus rejoined gloomily; "although for thy sake and mine I pray Pomponia's god may forfend."

"Always thou pratest of 'Pomponia's god,' " said Pythias, with a show of irritation. "Have a care lest I turn informer and charge thee with foreign superstition. 'Tis not prayers which shape her life but the Fates—and the Furies, who so often rend the virtuous and innocent while their tormentors go free. And oh! Marcus," the tears sparkling in her eyes, "only yesternight I heard her in the darkness lamenting to the shade of her mother: 'O that the ancient Clotho with her own hand had clipped my threads before sadly I saw thy wounds, thy face with gore besmeared!' "

The tribune uttered a whispered warning and Pythias darted behind a column as Octavia approached, setting out upon her periodic visit to the grim mausoleum to commune with the shade of Britannicus and strew with fresh flowers the *cippus* which bore his name.

With similar constancy she frequented the temples to pray and offer sacrifices: although it would be hard to determine just what consolation was found in these observances. While in a blind sort of way she believed in and worshipped the gods, neither the feeling nor its expression occasioned either warmth of heart or spiritual elevation.

At the beginning of the Christian era the religious sense of the Roman people was at a low ebb; luxury, prosperity and the laxity of the priesthood perhaps being the main

factors in this decadence. Under the old *régime*, which was passing, Jupiter Optimus Maximus—or some one of the many local deities readily identified with Jupiter—was recognized as the ultimate godlike power and the one who determined all human affairs. But of this supreme authority and causative power each of the innumerable inferior gods was considered as possessing an integral part.

The change from the republican to the imperial form of government occasioned and was only a little in advance of a transition in both the popular conception of supernatural power and the accepted ideals of religious worship. Under the skillful and delicate manipulation of Augustus, divine attributes came to be ascribed to the Cæsar: loyalty to the Emperor insensibly was blended with religious homage to his “Genius” while living, and when after death he had been translated directly to the ranks of the deities, either by vote of the Senate or the filial piety of his successor, he was worshipped as a god. In this way what might be termed “Emperor-worship” became in a general sense the only universal form of religion among the Roman people. And in its re-awakening of the religious conscience which resulted from this subtle intermixture of patriotism and worship, the imperial idea, proceeding from a purely selfish motive, actually prepared the way for the gospel of renunciation through faith and works.

But it was the old religion, rooted in superstition and fear, into which Octavia had been born, in the nature of which there could exist no sense of personal affiliation or inter-relation between the individual and the god. The main concern of the former was to avert the anger rather than invoke the kindly mercies of the deity. In the narrow limits of such a faith there was no such thing as reconciliation with the god through repentance and confession: the extreme of hope was comprised in the possibility of propitiating the divine wrath through sacrifice upon the altars and bestowal of generous gifts in a purely human

effort to purchase immunity—precisely as one would purchase a slave, or the means of whatsoever indulgence.

As a child Octavia had listened with eager interest to the stories of her friend's old Hebrew nurse about the strange god who had appeared in Jerusalem and the new religion which he taught; and to one of her reflective mind and dreamy imagination the recital was not so entirely that of a fairy-tale as it appeared to the essentially matter-of-fact Pythias. The idea of a religious worship grounded in personal sacrifice, unselfishness and purity, with an assured reward for right living and self-abnegation, appealed forcibly to the younger girl's spiritual nature and inherent virtue. After the death of Miriam, since there remained no one else with whom to discuss it, the story passed out of her mind until recalled in the course of her growing intimacy with Pomponia, when it became the subject of their frequent and earnest conversation. Although deeply impressed by the disclosure of Pomponia's secret adherence to the new Faith, the ideas involved were too complex for Octavia's pagan comprehension, and the force of the old traditions and superstitions too strong for so radical a departure from the thoroughly practical, not to say commercial, spirit of the Roman religion. While she cherished a vague sort of belief in a future state, it was more in the nature of a theory than a settled conviction. And while unselfish impulses and self-sacrifices were not unknown to the Rome of her day, in the main they proceeded from a sense of public duty and service to the State and had no place in religious consciousness. As for the promise to all mankind of immortal life and salvation (which to her meant little if anything more than escape from the terrors of Cerberus and the dreaded judgment of Minos) through vicarious sacrifice by deity itself, so fanciful an idea scarcely piqued either her interest or curiosity.

With the coming of an early spring, after a winter of exceptional severity, Pythias began to haunt the secluded

little garden, from an instinctive feeling that sooner or later its intimate attractions would lure Octavia from her solitary chamber.

On a day in March she had arisen at the first hint of dawn, and already was seated on the marble bench when the sun, peering above the crest of the Alban hills, shot his first golden rays into the limpid air and glorified the fresh beauty of the early Roman morning.

Absorbed in meditation she had not observed the great dog, which lay at her feet, raise his massive head, and after gazing intently in the direction of the opening in the hedge below, rise to his feet and stalk gravely down the grassy slope. Startled at last by a quiet footfall, she looked up suddenly to meet the calm gaze of Octavia, who was close upon her.

Pythias had not reckoned amiss in her conviction that if only Octavia would come and find her there it would afford the long-sought opportunity to break in upon the cold reserve which thus far had been like a dead wall between them. The tranquil peace and unobtrusive friendliness of the shy little enclosure, and the unexpected presence of her girlhood friend in the place where so often they had exchanged confidences, affected Octavia powerfully and brought a rush of memories and sensations entirely at variance with those to which she had yielded so long. Her face grew rigid with emotion as bending down with quivering lips she said in low, faltering tones:

“Always thou art so loyal and patient, so generous and forbearing—while in this—as in that other grief, I have been wholly selfish; not yet indeed have the gods whipped me into submission. Forgive me, *cara!*”

With a glad cry Pythias pressed her close, protesting earnestly, “’Tis I who deserve whipping for my selfish impatience with thy continued sorrow and my clumsy failure to be of help or comfort. And I have been so cross and hateful to Pomponia, who said we must wait—and pray. I did not want to wait—which seemed so unloving;

and what is the use of praying to gods who will not be appeased? Oh, how my heart hath ached for thee! But thou hast come back and shalt not escape me again. Let me at least make believe to share thy burden, if it be only to sit beside thee: I will not speak and thou wilt have it so. And Pomponia, who loves thee so tenderly—how she hath grieved that thou wouldst not see her”—and she held Octavia with an intensity of passion.

For a long time they sat in drooping silence, Pythias anxiously studying her companion's averted face, while quietly caressing the soft masses of her braided hair—their self-constituted guardian, with head resting on his outstretched paws, looking up with unwinking eyes in rapt worship of his adored mistress and the one so highly favored.

“In truth my heart must be dead—to have been so insensible to the sorrows of others,” at last Octavia murmured sadly, with a slight shiver. “All warmth seems to have gone from me—’tis as if I had been thrust into the terrible chill of the dark Stygian flow.” Then quietly disengaging herself she rose and after gazing wistfully at all the renascent beauties of the smiling garden in its first joyous response to the caresses of returning spring, she turned to Pythias and said, with an effort:

“Perchance it may yet come back to me, even as it hath to the grass and flowers after the cold blasts of winter. Be that as it may, today at least I will turn my back on grief and do as thou wouldst have. Let us first bear the flowers to Britannicus; then, instead of to Magna Mater, I will go with thee to Pomponia and implore her forgiveness.”

Marcus stared in amazement as Pythias, with radiant face, came running to him in the vestibule with a message to be sent to the villa. He listened with eager interest to her story—impressed as much by the new hope shining in her eyes as by the recital itself. And it was with something of the old spirit of banter that he said:

“Let not thy vain little head cheat thee with the idea that thy cunning plot and artful persuasion hath brought it about”; concluding seriously, “I tell thee ’tis Pomponia’s prayers to her Christus have worked the miracle.”

“If in truth her god hath done it, I too shall worship him,” she answered with decision; “and until it shall be made plain I give thee benefit of the doubt and take back what I said about thy foreign superstitions,” laughing gaily as she ran back to prepare for the journey.

POMPONIA GRÆCINA

PYTHIAS held stoutly to her assertion that Octavia should not be allowed to relapse into her former aloofness; although more than once compelled to a literal fulfillment of her engagement to refrain from speech if only permitted to be at the other's side.

After her first repentant visit to Pomponia, Octavia went frequently to the villa; and as the weeks passed, the healing magic of its peaceful setting and environment and the unobtrusive sympathy and discreet forbearance of its serene, benignant mistress, once more proved effective in assuaging the sharper pangs of her grief.

But despite all her resolution and the watchful efforts of her friends, she was still subject to periods of intense depression, during which everything she had gained seemed to have slipped away from her. It was during one of these temporary relapses that she appeared one sultry afternoon in the early autumn in response to an urgent message from Pomponia that she had something of the greatest interest and importance to disclose.

Octavia's dejected mood was not to be concealed, and resolving to postpone her disclosure, Pomponia led the way to her secluded little summer *cubiculum*, its latticed window open to the gently rising hillside toward the north.

Responding to Pomponia's tranquil remarks only in monosyllables, and as if even that effort taxed her self-command, at last Octavia left her chair near the window, and seating herself on the couch, laid her head wearily on

the matron's shoulder, in complete surrender to her sorrowful emotions.

"I know, I know," Pomponia whispered, her hands on those loosely clasped about her neck. "But as already He hath tempered thine affliction, in His greater mercy God yet may heal the open wounds."

The bowed head moved in hopeless dissent:

"If 'tis that strange god of the Hebrews of whom thou speakest, I know not where to seek him: thyself hath admitted he hath no temple, either in Rome or elsewhere. As for the gods of my fathers, unto whom always have I been faithful, seemingly no sacrifices can appease their wrath against the family of Claudius, of which now I remain alone; fluttering along with broken wings, in the shadow of a noble name, my only comfort in the thought that the gloomy cavern of the underworld which I was wont to dread hath lost its terrors! In truth the forgetfulness of death alone can end my woes."

"And Pythias and I, thy faithful tribune, Junius Varus and my dear husband—and all the world of Rome by whom thou art beloved: doth our devotion count as nothing?" she urged in tender reproach.

"Even those dear to me are a source of suffering, in that I cloud their happiness, and through fear that when the last blow falls I may drag them down with me." Then her long-repressed agony burst forth.

"Oh, bethink thee, who hath been more than a mother to me, of what the Furies unjustly have measured out, and judge not too harshly. My mother slain; my unfortunate father foully destroyed in the hour of his repentance, before he could make amends for his enforced harshness to his children; my beloved driven to a shameful death under a charge so infamous; the marriage, so unnatural and hateful, into which I was forced—and my hapless brother the victim of brutal treachery by the husband I so scorn and despise! Overwhelmed by grief and wretchedness and crushed by endless sorrow, my light hath gone out"; and

dropping to the floor she spread out her arms and laid her head upon the knees of the quietly-weeping woman bending over her.

If only that sorrowful, kneeling one herself could weep—if only once the recalcitrant tears might flow, and perchance make a breach in that cold, repellent barrier of introspection which so paralyzes self-help and shuts out the light of hope!

Pomponia thought of the new light which had illuminated her own troubled, doubtful soul—fitful and wavering at first, but burning ever brighter and more steadily: Oh, if with that flame she might kindle anew the ashes of this forlorn sufferer's burned-out faith—Christus aid her!

"I know that for such as are beyond reach of the scorching blaze 'tis easy to enjoin fortitude upon those bound to the stake, whom the flame devours: but have no fear thy foster-mother doth not comprehend, *puel-lula*," she whispered in motherly tenderness. "And now the sun declines and it grows cooler: let us go to the arbor and breathe the fragrant air."

With an effort Octavia regained her feet and said with forced composure:

"The tortured one who withstands every generous attempt to cut the cords forfeits all claim to sympathy and deserves to suffer. Thy leniency adds to my remorse and shame—yet bear with me once again. And the treasure thou hast found—may I not share it now? If, as I mistrust, 'tis a message from thy Christus, never might it find me more receptive. Make haste, *mater alma*, since I may not stay overlong, having promised Pythias to await with her in our little garden the rising of the moon."

"Then come with me to the *tablinum*," said Pomponia, in quick and glad acquiescence, and with a display of subdued excitement to which she was so unaccustomed that it set Octavia wondering as she followed to the room adjoining the atrium, where the family archives were stored.

Pushing aside a round, metal case containing books,

rolled up and labelled, from a cunningly devised secret pocket at the back of the recessed shelf, Pomponia withdrew a small, cylindrical roll. Removing the *membrana*, or protective covering of bright yellow parchment, and holding fast to an ivory knob at the end of the small stick which projected from the tube, she carefully unrolled the papyrus, saying in a voice that trembled slightly:

“’Tis but the copy of a letter written during the time of Tiberius, but oh! how precious to me in its disclosures, as thou wilt comprehend when I explain its import.

“More than once thou hast expressed surprise that although he lived on earth within the memory of not a few of his worshippers still living, none hath ventured to describe the appearance of the stranger god who appeared among the Hebrews. I too have wondered often, and confess it hath disturbed me. Now mayst thou learn”—with a rapt, triumphant glance at the scroll she was holding—“from this letter written by a Roman magistrate, the pro-consul Publius Lentulus, who during his consulate in Judæa, himself saw and knew the Christus. It was written to a friend in Rome, who gave it to a member of my own family, the Senator Julius Græcinus, father of the young Agricola.

“Græcinus was distinguished no less for inflexible integrity than for eloquence and philosophical learning. Contemptuously refusing to make a false charge against Marcus Silanus at the instance of the Emperor, he was cruelly put to death by Caius Cæsar, thy father’s predecessor. In the confiscation of his property the letter is supposed to have been destroyed, as of no value. But his trusted secretary, the freedman Philemon, who also had great curiosity in psychic learning and research, fortunately had made for himself a careful copy. Philemon hath secretly espoused the new faith and a few days since brought me this scroll, which never before hath been out of his possession.” And bending closer to the expectant Octavia she read in a low, thrilling voice:

“(Copy of a letter to the Senator Æmilius Scaurus, from P. Lentulus, pro-consul in Judæa, who saw the Hebrew Christus, took note of his marvellous work in teaching, his extraordinary miracles, and other amazing things about him, and wrote thus to his friends in Rome:)

“There hath appeared in these days a man named Jesus, of strange virtue—and he is still alive—who is called by the people the Prophet of Truth. His disciples call him the Son of God. He raiseth the dead, and cureth the sick.

“In appearance he is handsome, of medium size, and notable to see, with a face to inspire respect, and one for whom men feel love and fear when they look on him.

“He hath hair of the color of a ripe hazel-nut, short in front as far back as the ears, and behind them hanging down in shining glossy curls, somewhat darker, upon his shoulders. He weareth it parted in the middle, after the fashion of the Nazarenes.

“He hath a broad, smooth forehead; a countenance unwrinkled and spotless, suffused with a moderate color. No fault is to be found with his nose and mouth. He hath a full beard, which is of the color of his hair, not long, and parted in the middle. His expression is direct and forceful, with eyes which look at you full and clear.

“In rage he is dreadful, in conversation, mild. He is pleasant and agreeable; when joyful he still preserves his gravity; is never seen to laugh, though often to weep.

“He is tall and straight of body, and hath hands and arms that are beautiful to see. In conversation he is weighty, of few words, and unassuming. Handsome is he, among the sons of men . . . ”

For a long time after the tremulous voice ceased, Octavia sat in contemplative silence, with eyes cast down, her hands tightly clasping the ivory capped stick about which the tiny sheet of papyrus had been rolled. Anxiously studying the impassive face, Pomponia at length resumed:

“A great peace came over me when I first read what

thou hast heard. In all the long array of Roman temples, from that of Capitoline Jove to the 'Altar of an unknown god' on the Palatine, there is none whose deity hath the living, breathing presence of my beautiful Christus, now that I may picture him so clearly—he who raiseth the dead, and cureth the sick, and lifteth up the fallen and oppressed, and whose greater sympathy is for the poor and suffering: 'who is never seen to laugh—but often to weep.'

"As for his place of worship, of which thou didst speak today, we are taught that he hath a separate temple in the heart and consciousness of every believer; so that whosoever accepteth him as the one and only god, may come at will into his presence, and without other sacrifice than confession of faith and an earnest purpose to do his will, implore his love and mercy."

"As to thyself, such a temple would be a fit and beautiful dwelling place. But how may a god dwell in the heart of the evil doer and the impure—yea, of the commonest slave?" said Octavia with a slight frown.

"The Christus promiseth that through repentance and confession the greatest malefactor may be cleansed from his wickedness and become as a sinless child," the matron answered earnestly.

"How knowest thou of these promises and teachings of the god?" Octavia asked abruptly.

"They have come from those who lived with him in close companionship, chosen by him to spread the new faith as himself expounded it to them. Already that one of these chosen priests (of whom there were twelve) called Matthias, hath written down the god's own sayings, and copies of the writing even now are on the way to Rome, where the number of believers daily increaseth. Soon also is expected here a great teacher of the Faith, himself a Roman citizen converted by the god and inspired by his supernatural power, albeit once a persecutor of those with whom now he affiliateth."

"Would that I might hear him," said Octavia, reflectively. Then, with an eager glance at the matron, who was carefully rerolling the precious scroll, "I may not ask to take the writing; but at some convenient time thou wilt give me a copy?"

"Gladly," exclaimed Pomponia, for the moment thrown off her guard: "Copies have been prepared by Philemon to distribute at the meeting tonight, and one shall be retained for thee."

Octavia regarded her still more intently:

"Thou hast never before spoken of any such assemblage—nor ever invited me to accompany thee to meet thy companions in the new worship," she added naïvely.

Slightly confused, Pomponia answered evasively,

"For the most part they are humble people, and thy caste prejudice is strong. But some time, if truly thou desirest, thou shalt go with me. And in truth there are some close to Cæsar's household who have shown an interest."

"I shall hold thee to the promise," said Octavia quickly. "But now must I hasten before Pythias comes looking for me with a cohort"; and after the scroll had been restored to its hiding place, Pomponia accompanied her to the vestibule, where Marcus had been waiting with the carriage to take her to the city gate a full hour beyond the appointed time.

Octavia returned to the palace in a state of great mental confusion and disturbance. During all their previous conversations on the subject Pomponia had never spoken so freely about the Hebrew god and his teachings. New deities were constantly being added to the long list of Roman gods, without displacing any of the others; and the obscure story of the strange Christus had occasioned on her part little more than the same momentary curiosity which would have been aroused by any other mysterious newcomer into the ever-widening circle of supernatural agencies.

But the consciousness of her dependence upon the Roman gods always had been indissolubly linked with the belief that she was subject to their caprices. And the idea of a worship in which the mercy and protecting care of deity might become absolutely assured through the simple act of faith and good works impressed her none the less powerfully because at the moment incomprehensible. She resolved that at the first opportunity she would seek further light through attendance at some of the mysterious gatherings of those friends of Pomponia whose doubts had been resolved.

But an event was impending which was to plunge Octavia into fresh troubles and anxieties; and while closely connected with what had just occurred, its consequences, for the time being at least, precluded the carrying out of her intention.

On a dark rainy morning, shortly after the eventful conversation at the villa, Octavia was surprised by an early visit from the Augusta. Agrippina appeared both angry and disturbed. She closed the door carefully and leading Octavia to a far corner of the room, spoke in low, guarded tones.

"There is evil brooding for thy friend Pomponia, who is charged with false worship and dishonoring the statue of Cæsar. Suspicions of her disloyalty to the gods had been vaguely whispered before Aulus was sent to Mœsia; and at his urgent request thy father and I engaged that if ever the foul charges should be openly made during the General's absence, he would be afforded opportunity himself to conduct the trial. Now must I send word to him speedily. Canst spare Marcus? The tribune is above suspicion, and there is none more efficient or trustworthy."

Octavia, who had listened in alarm, rose hastily to summon a messenger, but Agrippina interposed: "Confident of thine approval, I have already sent for him in thy name. And there is something even more urgent.

"Nero hath assured me that action shall be deferred

until Aulus hath been notified. But never again may I put faith in my son's promises. Moreover, I know not what secret influence may have prompted the attack, nor sinister motive inspired it: perchance it is merely to clear the way for a blow at thyself." Then lowering her voice still more, she added significantly:

"Thou knowest how impossible it would be for Pomponia to disprove at least the first of these charges. In truth Aulus is the only one who can save her, through exercise of his right to judge as *pater familias*. To insure him opportunity for its timely assertion there is but a single way: and thou art the only one to compass it—although its accomplishment will strike heavily at thy pride."

"Tell me," said Octavia earnestly: "For Pomponia I would climb with naked feet the mounds of jagged refuse beyond the Tiber."

"The path to the anteroom of Acte may rack thy proud spirit even more terribly than the broken amphoræ of the dumping ground would lacerate thy tender feet," said Agrippina, meaningly.

Octavia drew back in dismay, a grey pallor overspreading her face. In a flash she comprehended her step-mother's project; that she should solicit Acte to obtain from Nero the same promise he had made to Agrippina, upon which the latter dared not rely.

She was aware of the freedwoman's unique influence over Nero, and of his habitual deference to her whims and fancies. And her contempt and aversion for the daughter of a slave, who from purely venal motives openly presumed to occupy the place which she herself had abandoned with such loathing and contempt, had not materially lessened at the reports, seemingly well-founded, of Acte's otherwise circumspect and blameless life—particularly her aloofness from the wilder revels of the dissolute palace band. All her womanly instincts, her inherited prejudices, and especially the proud spirit of caste, re-

volted against the idea of an appeal for help to her despised husband's lowborn paramour. The bare thought stirred her heart to angry protest.

But close at its heels came a counter-thought to choke back the refusal rising to her lips. Agrippina had said it was the only way to save Pomponia. The service exacted was in the nature of a direct challenge to her oft-professed love for the noble, tender-hearted matron and admiration of the gallant soldier, with his stern Roman virtue. What sacrifice of pride or self-abasement on her part if successful would not be abundantly compensated by such vital assistance to her beloved friends in their hour of danger?

Behind the inscrutable calm of the downcast face each stage of the struggle between these conflicting emotions was plainly manifest to the observant Agrippina. So far as Pomponia's fate alone was concerned, she was indifferent. But for Octavia's sake she wanted to save her. And she had never forgotten the emotions aroused by the lofty attitude of Plautius during their last interview. Nor was she unmindful of the possibility that his friendly gratitude might not come amiss in the dark days which so surely were impending. Moving closer, she said reassuringly:

"I share thine abhorrence at thought of Cæsar's wife, herself an Emperor's daughter, appealing to Cæsar's mistress to win for her a favor which if sought directly her husband would refuse. But when we fight the Fates no effective instrument is too despicable, nor sacrifice too great. Bethink thee too she is but Cæsar's vulgar and mercenary profligate; and thus thine own lofty eminence will safeguard thee from contamination."

"If, rather, I could but forget she is what thou sayest, the ordeal would be easier," said Octavia breathlessly. "Ei! In my blind egotism methought I had sounded the depths of suffering: the thirst of Tantalus, the rending pains of Tatyus, the racking toil of Sisyphus, the hopeless agony of Ixion on the fiery wheel. Now doth appear this undreamed of pain—this threatened shame to my

self-respect, thus far unstained, the bare thought of which appalleth me.”

Agrippina regarded her with a curious mixture of contempt and sympathy. In the long struggle to accomplish her ends, demands upon what might have been considered her self-respect had been the least burdensome of the endless sacrifices exacted of her.

“Thou takest it too hard. But see! I will lessen the sense of shame and to that extent spare thy self-respect by myself sending the wench to thee—whereupon easily thy woman’s art should accomplish it without undue suffering to thy pride.”

But Octavia had made her decision. Exhausted by the struggle, although relieved by the very force of her final outburst she answered wearily:

“It were unwise to jeopardize success by half-measures or unworthy cowardice. Command not her presence—it might affright her and reach thy son’s ears. Rather shall I send word that Octavia begs the Lady Acte to wait on her at the tenth hour. But spare me now—who have not thy will and endurance—from further converse. I know the part assigned me, and pray the gods—yea,” with a defiant gesture—“Pomponia’s god if in truth he is the more powerful—that I may not fail.”

The Augusta bent and kissed her on the brow: “If only the Fates had decreed thou shouldst have been Nero’s willing wife, my toil might not have been in vain. May the Great Mother guard thee!”

Promptly at the hour appointed Acte was announced. As the door swung wide a dainty little figure appeared in the opening, and after a moment’s pause advanced hesitatingly toward Octavia, half-reclining on a couch at the upper end of the room.

It was the first time either had seen the other except at a distance, and neither was prepared for the resulting impression—in each case so at variance with preconceived opinion.

The former Asiatic slave was at the height of her youthful beauty and charm. In the clinging folds of her soft, white robes, rich in texture but without ornamentation and otherwise unpretentious, the graceful lines of a slender, supple figure were discernible. The pure Caucasian type of her race disclosed itself in the delicate rose-tints of a faultless complexion, the deep blue of the limpid eyes, shaded by long dark lashes, and the yellow-gold coloring of her hair, gathered low in thick, wavy masses. Slender feet and hands, small, well-shaped ears set close against the gracefully moulded head, a straight, sensitive nose, and the faultless white teeth in their coral setting of finely arched lips, contributed to a picture of beauty unmarred by a single lack among those subtle refinements supposedly the exclusive *indicia* of long and unbroken patrician descent.

But for Octavia, astounded by this apparition of serene and modest loveliness in place of the coarse, flaunting creature she had expected, it was her expression of ingenuous candor that constituted Acte's final and compelling charm. Presumably it was the same childlike *naïveté* which convinced her imperial protector that the former slave girl was the only one in the world who loved him for himself alone—and thus found the solitary opening in the armor of Nero's evil nature: as in the case of the humble Marie Touchet and that other mad ruler who rang the bell of St. Bartholomew.

Uncertain as to the nature of the reception awaiting her, Acte paused when halfway across the room, and after an anxious, questioning glance at the motionless figure on the couch, with flushed cheeks and eyes cast down, waited uneasily. Misinterpreting Octavia's prolonged silence—occasioned alone by the effort to regain her composure—the disconcerted freedwoman began to lose her own self-control: the color gradually receded from her face, her breathing became hurried and her limbs trembled. Her manifest emotion and distress touched a responsive chord

in Octavia's gentle breast. Rising hastily she hurried to Acte's side, and half-leading, half-supporting her to the couch, said regretfully:

"I have been thoughtless and ungracious, and crave thy pardon: but truly it hath been in no small part because of admiration, and thus really a tribute rather than an affront. Let me arrange the cushions that thou mayest rest comfortably—then I will send for a cup of wine; thy hands are cold and thy cheeks have lost their lovely coloring," and she smiled encouragingly.

Acte flashed a startled, wondering glance at the kindly face bending over her. In the eyes which frankly met her own she saw only sincerity and womanly pity. She started to speak, but her voice failed, and sliding to the floor she crouched at Octavia's feet, weeping softly.

With quiet insistence Octavia helped her back to the couch, soothing her as gently as if she were a frightened child, until at last, with averted face, Acte stammered between her sobs:

"How canst thou be so kind and gracious to me! He—they told me thou wert cold and haughty and unfeeling. How I have wronged thee—in this and in that other: and thou, with so great cause to hate and despise me, art so forbearing and merciful. I am accursed! Great Mother spare and help me!"

"In my thoughts I have in truth judged thee harshly," Octavia answered, with a troubled shake of the head. "But mayhap each hath gone astray in judgment of the other. Let us not speak of it further while thou art so shaken and unstrung, and I myself confused and anxious. Besides time presses: I am in urgent need of thine assistance and there is danger in delay."

Octavia could have adopted no happier expedient for distracting Acte's mind from the self-reproach and remorse which oppressed her. Of a highly emotional nature, all thought of self vanished in the swift reaction to joy resulting from this unexpected appeal for help. The rich

color surged back to her face as she clasped Octavia's hands, her eyes swimming with glad emotion.

"Tell me—and the gods grant it may be some real sacrifice thou wilt accept from me," she cried with such depth of feeling that Octavia felt her heart throb with its voluntary surrender to the appeal of this strange creature who so impetuously had broken through all her prejudicial barriers.

In a few simple words she told her everything—laying especial stress upon Pomponia's goodness, of the tenderness of their relation, and of the trust Aulus had reposed in the promise of her father and Agrippina.

Acte's face whitened a little at the beginning of the recital. But with the last words she sprang to her feet with eager confidence.

"Let me go, that not a moment may be lost! Never have I done anything so gladly, and the task will be easier since Cæsar knoweth my own regard for the Lady Pomponia."

"Thou knowest Pomponia?" said Octavia in surprise.

"More than once have I talked with her," the other answered shyly, "but I beg thou wilt not speak of it to any one without her approval. Now I shall go—and send thee word as soon as may be. And if it happens that we meet not again, at least let me have the happiness of having dared to say that Acte loveth thee!" and she withdrew precipitately.

Early the next day Agrippina appeared with a missive from Acte: "She sent it through me as less likely to attract attention," said the Augusta, who listened intently as Octavia read aloud:

ACTE to OCTAVIA:

Cæsar hath signed the recall of Aulus Plautius, who is retired from further military or other service to the State *honestâ missio*, and already the dispatch is on its way. 'Twas a slave of Pomponia who reported to the

delator. The lips of the informer have been sealed, and the slave witness will be held in close detention. It is believed the latter was prompted by some woman of the palace; but that is not part of the information, only vague rumor, which indeed the slave denies; and since I can learn no more, its truth or falsity must wait the inquiry by Aulus. Until his return nothing will be done: have no fear—I have Cæsar's promise.

Octavia folded the tablets with a sigh of relief, but the Augusta said bitterly:

“His promise to a vile paramour may be relied upon—while that to his mother, the first woman in Rome, is of doubtful worth! But this traitorous woman of the palace of whom she speaketh: hast thou suspicion?” with a penetrating glance.

Octavia shook her head helplessly.

“Then will I tell thee: 'tis the crippled Greek girl whom thy mother assigned to thee. She hath never forgotten her injury, and lives for revenge. I see thou also thinkest it,” noting Octavia's startled expression: “Be warned—and let the shades engulf her before she striketh more surely.

“As for this Acte, who addresseth thee with such freedom, have a care also: in truth she herself is the one I would suspect but for the cripple, whom I have long distrusted.”

“In that at least I know thou wouldst be wrong,” said Octavia warmly. “And in other things, too, I fear she hath been misjudged. I cannot believe her false; and for this so-great service she hath rendered, my heart is grateful and full of kindly feeling.”

Agrippina regarded her with displeasure, and her face hardened.

“A base wretch is none the less beneath thy contempt because of a service rendered which either she dared not refuse or performed to win thy trust for some evil purpose,” she said coldly. “This woman was born a slave,

and hath become a wanton. Rome is full of prostitutes: if thou must have one as a friend, seek elsewhere than in thy husband's bed-chamber," she added disdainfully. "But I grant she hath played her part well and quickly, and thy other friend, the wife of Aulus, who at least is well-born and otherwise of good repute, for the moment is safe. Yet wouldst thou best caution her to be discreet until Aulus returns. Give me the tablets that I may destroy them."

Thus through the instrumentality of the once obscure slave girl from far-off Iberia—that land of mystery and romance, where Prometheus suffered and the Argonauts sought the golden fleece—Pomponia escaped the ordeal of a hostile and unfeeling tribunal under an accusation which was equivalent to that of treason against the State, and at a time when such a charge usually meant death.

Quietly re-entering Rome, a few weeks later Aulus promptly assembled his wife's kindred, and in observance of the primitive institution, in their presence held solemn inquisition upon her conduct and character.

The slave upon whose testimony the charge had been preferred admitted that he himself accidentally overturned the statue of Nero, which was shattered in its fall to the marble pavement; and in a panic of fear had accused his mistress—to which already he had been predisposed by jealousy of an associate who had been preferred in her esteem. He stoutly denied having accomplices or abettors.

Pomponia was adjudged innocent, and the false witness condemned to death. Aulus sternly refused to heed the tender-hearted matron's plea that he should be pardoned, but finally consented to a mitigation of the punishment. He was degraded out of the slave *familia*, and sent in fetters to the *ergastulum*, or place of correction attached to the Campanian farm of one of the General's friends, there to drag out his wretched life at hard labor, and in chains.

Octavia had been at pains not to tell any one about Agrippina's suspicions of Eos; and greatly relieved by the slave's testimony that he had no accomplices, for which she had been prepared by the Greek girl's calm and scornful assertion in reply to her questioning that never had she seen or communicated with him, the incident passed from her mind.

POPPÆA SABINA

AULUS PLAUTIUS had not failed to embrace the “golden opportunity” accorded him by the Emperor Claudius to crown his great military achievements with a notable State service as *legatus proprætore* in Mœsia.

This important consular province lay to the north of Thrace and Macedonia, and extended from Illyricum and Pannonia on the west to the Euxine Sea, the river Danube (the Ister of the ancient Greeks) constituting its northern boundary: thus corresponding roughly with the modern Servia and Bulgaria.

Although a considerable part of the military force ordinarily considered essential to the proper defense of this northern frontier had been diverted to the support of Corbulo in the east, during all of his four years’ stay Plautius never once allowed the supremacy of the Roman arms to be questioned. He even extended his authority beyond the Euxine, from far-off Scythia obtaining huge supplies of corn for Roman consumption. Perhaps his most conspicuous achievement was the transportation of nearly a hundred thousand barbarians to the depopulated district on the right bank of the Danube, skillfully intermingling them with Roman colonists, that they might become habituated to civilization: as a result of which the formerly desolate no-man’s-land gradually became one of the most reliable bulwarks of the Empire.

But these arduous and unintermittent labors had taken heavy toll from Aulus, long past the meridian of his powers: so that he was ill-prepared for the hard journey

through Macedonia, across the Adriatic to Brundisium and up to the city, especially under the mental distress occasioned by his unexpected recall. The final ordeal of the family inquisition completely exhausted his strength and brought him to the verge of collapse.

In her anxiety Pomponia was the more disposed to heed the advice of those who urged that her husband should seek needed rest and recreation in travel, to which, however, he was disinclined. But the matron received unexpected assistance from the Augusta, who came to the villa with Octavia, shortly after the trial. When Aulus expressed his deep obligation for her warning message, but for which he would not have returned so expeditiously, Agrippina replied gravely:

“My service hath been as nothing compared with that of Octavia, without whose assistance there is doubt thou wouldst have arrived in time. Nay, ’tis from her thou must extort the story: I have come merely to venture a word of friendly warning and advice. All Rome is at thy back, and none would dare raise his hand against thee. But ’tis not so as to Pomponia, whose virtue itself seemingly provoketh enmity. No woman ever is safe in Rome unless a dweller in the Atrium of Vesta.

“I know thy courage, but an unknown enemy is hard to worst. Tempt not the Fates further, but take thy wife from Rome, for a time—to Sicilia, or better still, across the sea. Before thy return perchance the hidden foe may be disclosed.”

Then rising to depart she said to Octavia:

“As thou lovest thy friends, add thine entreaties to Pomponia’s and mine; and let neither fear nor false modesty restrain thee from a full disclosure of what hath happened.”

In a few simple words Octavia related what had occurred between Acte and herself, and the latter’s hint that someone in the palace had instigated the charges.

Aulus listened in frowning perplexity. He himself had

doubted the slave's testimony that he had acted upon his own initiative. It was incredible that Pomponia's supposed adherence to the new teaching had been thought worthy of official notice. He knew that tolerance in religious matters had become almost a State rule in Rome; that it had long been a matter of choice whether sacrifices should be made to the Latin gods or the deities of Greece; that under Caligula the cult of the Egyptian Isis had received formal recognition, while even Mithras, the sun-god of the Persians, had been openly worshipped and his followers unmolested under Tiberius. Why then might not the claims of a Hebrew god receive sympathetic consideration?

To be sure, under Claudius every Jew had been banished from the imperial city. But that had been only a "passing cloud": already they were back in their haunts beyond the Tiber. Indeed, it had been credibly reported that Nero himself had displayed an interest in the strange new Jewish deity. And since in Rome it was lawful for a citizen to abandon his State religion, in favor of the Hebrew belief, for example, why might not one with like freedom embrace what actually was not a new religion, but merely a Jewish cult?

To Aulus personally Pomponia's religious convictions were a matter of indifference: so long as no disloyalty to the State and the Genius of the Emperor was involved, what particular gods were cherished or worshipped was of no importance to the intrepid, unpretending old pagan.

But while expressing himself thus freely to Octavia and his wife, Aulus was not oblivious to the warning of Agrippina, who was neither an alarmist nor easily misled. The suggestion of a holiday also had its appeal: he recalled the observation of Claudius that after completion of his last public service he might enjoy the sunset of life. As Agrippina had implied, he could handle the cowardly traducers more effectively when they should be disclosed; and impulsively he decided to follow her advice.

"Where is this teacher Paulus, whose coming to Rome thou hast been so impatiently awaiting?" he said abruptly to Pomponia.

"He is in Corinth, as 'tis reported," she answered in surprise.

"Well, then, after a brief stay at my old home in the Sabine hills, where if the gods will I may regain semblance of strength and energy, let us journey to Greece in search of the dallying priest, that thou mayst satisfy thy yearning without further loss of time. Shall it be so, *amata?*" pressing her hand tenderly.

"Ah! ever art thou too kind and thoughtful," said Pomponia in a tremulous voice, as with misty eyes she kissed him on the forehead: and overcome with emotion hurriedly left the room.

"I thank thee for thy generous service," said Aulus simply to Octavia. "And Acte—thou wilt bear to her the gratitude of an old soldier: Pomponia appeareth strangely disposed in her favor.

"I may not speak of thy sorrows, but thou knowest how deep hath been my sympathy. May the gods spare thee! And if thou and that lively daughter of Fabius will spend a few days with us at Tibur before we start for the sea, it would be a great solace. Go now and arrange it with Pomponia—and send Marcus to me: I am exhausted by these overlong feminine discussions," cloaking his own emotions under a momentary display of the old humor.

The country home of the Plautii was at Tibur, three or four hours' journey from Rome. At the foot of the slope along which the town was scattered the river Anio wound through its ravines to the riotous waterfalls below, the hillside affording an extensive view of the Campagna, its western horizon smeared with the haze of the great city.

With its famous olive groves, its groups of magnificent cypresses, its terraces, grottoes and cascades, its charming vistas and bold mountain views, and withal its general salubrity, the ancient Latium settlement had attracted

many members of the aristocracy to locate their summer homes there. The favorite country resort of the poet Horace was not far distant, while his friend and patron, the first Emperor, also had an elaborate villa in the neighborhood.

In the pure invigorating air, the simple ways of living and the restful charm of the vernal season, Aulus quickly rallied from his physical and mental depression, and after a few weeks announced to Pomponia that he was prepared to embark upon their journey, for which all arrangements had been completed.

Octavia, Pythias and the tribune spent the last few days with them in their beautiful Sabine home. Aulus, who had regained all his former spirits, found especial pleasure in rallying Pythias about Junius Varus, who shortly before the General's return to Rome had joined a Pannonian legion on its way to reinforce the army in the East.

"He withstood all the appeals of his former military chief until Corbulo wrote that the daughter of Tiridates, just arrived at marriageable age and reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the East, would be one of the prizes of war: then Junius promptly capitulated and begged for his transfer. Some fine day thou wilt see him return to Rome with a Parthian princess at his side!"

"It were a consequence his friends gladly would endure for the glory of Corbulo's success against the Parthian King," said Pythias lightly. "But I would be sorry for Quintilla: she hath waited so hopefully—and with such jealous determination," she added with a sly glance at the delighted Marcus, who always revelled in these passages between the doughty General and his vivacious friend, and secretly rejoiced when, as customarily, the latter came off victorious.

For the most part Octavia and the matron were left to themselves. Serenely happy in her husband's recovery and in the promised realization of her passionate longing to meet the famous priest of Christus, the coming of these

beloved friends to brighten their last hours in Rome had stirred Pomponia to the most generous and unreserved expression of all her amiable and engaging qualities. Never had her tenderness, her nobility and transparent sincerity appealed more forcibly to Octavia: nor had the latter ever before realized her dependence upon this calm, lofty-minded and lovable woman, who, as she instinctively felt, was going out of her life forever. And although she had steadfastly refrained from clouding Pomponia's contentment with her own distress and oppressive premonitions, when the hour of parting came, her fortitude nearly gave way.

"Never may I hope to repay thee for thy goodness," she whispered brokenly. "Every moment thou shalt be in my heart: and thine own heart shall be the temple where in fancy still I shall go with my confidences and my prayers. And if thou dost find thy Christus in truth is what thou wouldst fain believe, pray to him for thy *miseræ puellæ*."

Two days later Aulus and Pomponia had left Rome for the sea. And while on a calm and beautiful evening they were crossing in safety from Brundisium to Dyrrachium, on another ship which was rounding the Cape of Misenum on the west coast the woman under whose persuasion they had turned their backs on danger unconsciously was approaching the tragic end of her life-voyage.

Gradually but steadily the Augusta had been losing prestige and influence, until at last it became evident not only that Nero would tolerate no further assumption of authority by his mother either in affairs of State or his personal dispositions, but he intended actually to disgrace her. The company of German soldiers which after the death of Claudius had been assigned to her as an escort was withdrawn; then her guard of honor, on sentinel duty at the gates, was taken away, and finally she was removed from the palace to the home of her grandmother Antonia. When she went abroad Nero no longer walked beside her litter: he visited her with growing infrequency and never

unless accompanied by a guard, as if fearing some treachery. One by one her supporters had dropped away; until with the exception of Octavia and a few women—the latter apparently actuated less by loyalty than the feminine desire to enjoy the other's humiliation—everyone shunned the once powerful and arrogant woman before whom all Rome had bowed in adulation.

The crowning indignity was a charge of treason at the instance of Junia Calvina, the former wife of Messalina's bigamous husband. Angered by some slight on the part of Agrippina, with whom she had been on terms of close intimacy, Silana induced a freedman to depose that the Augusta was plotting Nero's death and the elevation of Rubellius Plautus, a son of Pomponia's lamented friend, the murdered Julia, and thus a great-grandson of Tiberius.

Interrogated by Burrhus and Seneca, at Nero's command, Agrippina scornfully refused even to deny the charges, angrily demanding an interview with her son. Nero had acted under a panic of fear and anger: but when without a word in refutation his mother upbraided him bitterly for subjecting her to the insult of such an inquisition and fiercely demanded vengeance upon her accusers, once more he quailed before her fiery predominance and yielded to her demands. Junia was condemned to exile, the freedman sentenced to death, and the others who had participated were banished.

But the Augusta realized that it was a pyrrhic victory and that her craven and cowardly son would seek revenge for her momentary ascendancy. It was in the bitterness and dejection thereby occasioned that she had urged Aulus to take his wife from Rome: and under the same impulsion herself left the city for her mountain villa at Tusculum.

Down to this time Nero's irregularities and vices had been to an extent concealed. But construing his mother's departure as a tacit admission of her final defeat and of

his complete emancipation, all subterfuges were cast aside in the further indulgence of his appetites.

A new force had arisen to drive him. The star of Acte, the unselfish and ingenuous freedwoman, was in its decline; and under the sinister influence of the dazzling patrician beauty who had taken the other's place in the firmament of Nero's passion, he was breaking through the veneer of what thus far indulgently had been regarded as only youthful indiscretions—on the point of embarking openly upon his subsequent unparalleled career of crime and infamy. And as originally Otho had been the boy-Emperor's preceptor in loose living and cultivation of the baser parts, now it was his beautiful but depraved wife, Poppæa Sabina, who was to give the decisive impulse to those irresolute passions which her profligate husband had aroused.

Poppæa's mother was that noted beauty of the same name who through the jealous enmity of Messalina had lost her life in the affair of Asiaticus. Her father, Titus Ollius, a quæstor in the time of Tiberius, perished in the wholesale condemnation of the friends of Sejanus. Her mother's father had been consul, and enjoyed triumphal honors under Augustus.

With the pride and arrogance of her patrician ancestry Poppæa inherited also her mother's striking beauty, great personal charm and mental gifts of a high order: while in laxity of principles she far surpassed the celebrated rival of Messalina. With this endowment at an early age she had been married to Rufus Crispinus, a Roman knight, by whom she had a son who ultimately fell a victim to Nero's insensate rage.

Proud of his young wife's beauty and popularity, Crispinus was unduly complacent to the crowd of admirers who assiduously paid court to her; and thus afforded every opportunity to indulge her vagrant fancies, in the end Poppæa abandoned her husband and without the formality of a divorce married Otho, whose family posi-

tion, great wealth and close intimacy with the Emperor held high promise for her soaring ambitions.

For a while Otho succeeded in secreting his treasure from the roving eye of Nero. But it was impossible long to conceal a beautiful woman in Rome—particularly in the case of Poppæa, who from affected modesty never appeared in public without a veil! And when the inevitable disclosure occurred, Nero surrendered so precipitately and with such unreserved abandon as to more than realize Otho's worst forebodings. The chagrined husband speedily was dispatched as Governor to one of the most distant provinces in the west, and Nero devoted all his energies to overcoming the artful resistance and pretended virtuous scruples with which Poppæa skillfully inflamed his passion.

Her own resolve had long been made. She would be Empress—or nothing at all to Nero. Absolutely sure of her own powers—and thus of Nero's acceptance of her terms—she perceived only three obstacles to the attainment of her ambition: her husband, Agrippina and Octavia.

Promptly and of his own accord, Nero had removed the first; and under her insistent proviso that if she came to the palace it must be with the full concurrence of Agrippina, and the assurance that ultimately Octavia should be divorced to make room for her as Cæsar's lawful wife, gradually the conclusion formed in the mind of the infatuated youth that his mother must be put out of the way. He knew she would never consent to the theft of Otho's wife—much less to the repudiation of Octavia: why should he longer submit to this constant interference with his inclinations and reiterated intrusion upon his personal rights—which reacted upon him like a continuous nightmare? His mother should die!

Once decided he addressed himself to the idea with the cold and calculating insensibility which had characterized the murder of Britannicus. In the present case he might

not make use of the former agency: poisoning would be too obvious. He must enlist the aid of someone at once shrewd enough to devise a method easy of concealment, and courageous enough to undertake it. And the benign gods happily led his thoughts to his former tutor, whose lasting enmity Agrippina had incurred through discharging him for dishonesty. Anicetus was resourceful and rapacious. Nero summoned him at once from Misenum, where he was in charge of the fleet—and was carried away with the simplicity of the plan which the Admiral, who was a skillful mechanic, speedily evolved and willingly engaged to undertake.

It happened that everything was in timely accord with the essential requirements for a successful outcome of the project. As the spring advanced Agrippina, in restless inquietude, had crossed from Tusculum to the coast and was living in seclusion at Antium, some twenty miles from Rome. There she received a penitent and affectionate letter from Nero imploring her to forget the past and to meet him halfway in a resumption of their former tender and harmonious relations. He freely admitted his unfilial conduct, craftily insinuating that evil advisers had prompted and misled him; and pleading earnestly for an opportunity to demonstrate publicly the love and reverence he cherished for his mother, urged her to join him at Baiæ, where he was going with Seneca to keep the feast of Minerva.

The message could not have arrived more opportunely to effect its purpose. Worn out by the long struggle, her life-work crumbled into ruins, her motive destroyed and her energies undermined, wearied and disillusioned, desolate and alone save for a few faithful servants, Agrippina had become the prey of brooding sadness and gloomy reflections. It is conceivable that at this very time, while in the stress of these racking emotions, she posed for that wonderful reclining statue in the Borbonico which holds the observer spell-bound by its tragic melancholy, its air

of sombre introspection, its incomparable majesty of sadness and woe.

In a different atmosphere and under other circumstances Nero's effusive appeal could not have failed to awaken distrust in one to whom watchfulness against treachery and mischance had become a second nature. But in this hour of dejection and misery the wretched woman embraced it as eagerly as one struggling in the ravenous quicksands would snatch at a life-saving rope. Perhaps also in the house where Nero had been born twenty-two years before, the tender mother-heart for that reason especially reasserted its sway and refused to harbor suspicion against the object of its long and unremittent devotion.

At any rate, there was not a moment of indecision. On the coast near Baïæ she owned a little summer house which—as her son was aware—already had been put in readiness for her customary spring visit. To avoid both the publicity and discomfort of a land journey, she resolved to go down by water, for which there was abundant time since there remained nearly a week before the great festival of the *Quinquatrus*, which began on the nineteenth of the month and lasted five days. Accordingly Nero's messenger returned to Rome with word that the Augusta would sail on the second or third day following, and proceed directly to her villa at Bauli.

Her simple preparations were made quickly; and on the day before the Ides, attended only by her favorite maid, Acerronia, and Crepereius Gallus, her trusted house-physician, Agrippina embarked exultantly on an old Liburnian galley, light of draft, long, narrow and pointed at both ends, with a double bank of oars and a mast amidships.

Throughout the pleasant journey down the coast the sea was calm and the winds favorable. Relieved from the incubus which had oppressed her, and reacting to the glorious March sunshine and the refreshing sea air,

Agrippina regained a large measure of her inborn self-assurance and poise. Eagerly she watched the bold headland of Misenum loom in the little vessel's gradual approach; and her heart throbbed with an emotion to which it had long been a stranger when toward the end of a beautiful afternoon the galley turned the cape and entered the sheltered little harbor of Bauli, near the Lucrine lake, not far from the imperial palace which crowned one of the heights across the bay.

Apprised of her coming by the watchful look-outs, Nero awaited his mother at the landing, with Seneca, the prefect Burrhus and a large company of important personages who had accompanied him from Rome. News of a reconciliation between mother and son had been industriously circulated at the latter's instance; and Nero's own tender and affectionate greetings were elaborately set off by the enthusiastic welcome accorded by these others—in such striking contrast with their recent attitude of aloofness and reserve. But to the pleased Augusta, in the glow of her new-found hope, the emotions of the moment were all-sufficient; and she responded as graciously to the effusion of her old friends as if their homage and respect had never been interrupted.

Riding at anchor off the pier was a graceful and richly ornamented galley, with three banks of oars, completely manned and equipped with a guard of honor, of which the Emperor begged his mother's acceptance, suggesting its use in her attendance at a banquet to be given in her honor that evening; and after accompanying her to her villa, he took his leave with renewed expressions of his love and unbounded joy at her arrival.

Was it from some vague, haunting distrust of the *alter ego*, which her sober second-judgment awakened—or, as she afterwards explained to Nero, in truth because after the monotony of her sea journey she craved the variety afforded by the beautiful winding road, with its enchanting sunset views, that instead of using the shining

new galley, with its imposing *cortège*, she elected to go to the castle in a litter, attended only by Crepereius and her maid?

But for Agrippina the Fates had determined and no longer were to be restrained.

Occupying the seat of honor above the Emperor, from whom, as well as all the other guests, she received the most delicate and flattering attentions, to the mother of Nero all the humiliation and sorrow of the past months seemed like a long-forgotten dream. And when, after being protracted to a late hour, the banquet broke up, she readily yielded to her son's insistence that instead of traversing the dark descent in her litter, she must return in her splendid new boat, which had been brought across the bay by his thoughtful prevision. He escorted her to the landing and the last farewells were exchanged with an exceptional display of feeling on the part of each.

There was no moon, but as if to bear damning testimony against the impious deed the gods had provided a night lit up by stars, while not a breath stirred the unruffled deep.

Agrippina reclined upon a high-backed couch, her maid seated on a cushion at her feet and Gallus leaning against the rail. Suddenly the ceiling gave way with a crash—having been loaded with lead—and the disruption setting free some secret and cunningly devised mechanism, the vessel lurched heavily to the sounding of rending timbers and inrushing water.

But the expected result was not attained. Protected by the high back of the couch, instead of being crushed by the falling mass Agrippina and her maid escaped with only some painful bruises, and when the vessel rolled they slid gently into the quiet sea.

A scene of wild confusion ensued—those among the crew who were not in the secret attempting to right the boat, while Anicetus and his confederates were laboring to complete its destruction.

Frantically calling for help, and to "Save the mother of Cæsar!" Acerronia was mistaken for the Augusta by the overzealous agents of the Admiral and sank under a savage blow on the head from a boat hook. Agrippina had fallen clear of the ship and was clinging to a piece of wreckage when the ruthless deed occurred. Although suffering from a severe wound on the shoulder, she was at home in the water, and quietly leaving her support, she swam away in the darkness—as it happened in the direction of an approaching boat. A few moments later she was picked up by some fisherman who took her ashore and assisted her to her villa.

She had too much penetration to be misled by what had occurred. She knew it was no chance blow which had destroyed Acerronia, and in a flash the whole plot had become clear to her. The dream edifice which she had erected on the false foundation of her treacherous son's pretenses had vanished forever.

Strangely enough, instead of being overcome by it, the shock of the disclosure served rather to restore her mental balance and arouse all her combative instincts. She saw clearly that while heretofore it had been a question of power and influence, at last it had become one of life itself. For that she would fight. But time was required to recover from her injuries and marshal most effectively her slender resources, and for the moment therefore she must dissemble by leading Nero to believe she entertained no suspicion of his treachery. Accordingly her freedman Agerinus was dispatched at once with a message to the Emperor that "through the mercy of the gods and the auspicious influence of his fortune, she had escaped a grievous casualty," while urging that howsoever disturbed by the accident and concerned for her welfare, he should postpone visiting her for the present, since all she needed was rest.

Nero was filled with consternation when he learned of his mother's escape, and realizing that she must be aware

of his guilt, at once sought the advice of Seneca and Burrhus. Greatly embarrassed, the former remained silent. But when the terrified Emperor inquired of the prefect whether the prætorians would protect him in case Agrippina should undertake a revolt upon the pretext that he had made an attempt upon her life, Burrhus answered emphatically that the soldiers never would raise their swords against a daughter of Germanicus: coldly subjoining that if Cæsar had reason for his fears, he would better let the Admiral carry out his engagements.

Anicetus instantly rejoined that he was willing and ready; and at an affirmative gesture from Nero was leaving the room when the Augusta's messenger was announced. As the freedman entered Anicetus contrived to drop a dagger at his feet—then cried loudly that Agerinus had been sent to assassinate the Emperor! The freedman was seized by the guards and heavily ironed; while the Admiral at the head of an armed band, hurried to the villa, burst open the gates, and with the captain of the galley and a naval centurion forced his way into the dimly-lighted chamber where, sleepless with pain and anxiety, the Augusta lay awaiting her messenger's return.

Although the dazed and suffering woman did not recognize her shadowy visitors, she caught the gleam of up-raised swords and knew the end had come. But not for an instant did her indomitable spirit falter or her dauntless courage fail. Angrily denouncing the insolent intrusion she cried menacingly:

“Depart! ere my slaves scourge thee from the door! And if the Emperor sent thee to learn of his mother's condition, take back word that she refuses to entrust a message to such vile menials!”

“’Tis assurances of thy death, not thy welfare, Cæsar craves,” sneeringly replied Anicetus, as his confederates surrounded the couch.

“Thou liest, foul scum!” cried the Augusta, with blazing

eyes; "thou, who hast instigated him, art the real murderer!"

In answer Herculeius, the boat-captain, struck her a cruel blow on the head. By a desperate effort the dying woman raised herself from the cushions, the blood streaming down her face; and tearing the robe from her body with a gesture of tragic scorn and majesty, cried in a last impassioned defiance:

"Strike the body which gave birth to the monster who hath countenanced thee!" and loosed from its torture chamber by the swords of the assassins, the furious and embittered soul took flight into the shadows.

Under cover of the night, without pomp or ceremony and in the meanest manner, the dishonored corpse of the woman who was the great-granddaughter, the sister, the wife and the mother of an Emperor, was committed to the funeral pyre; and through the kindly ministration of devoted servants the ashes were placed in a humble monument near the villa once occupied by "the foremost man of all the Roman world"—the great Dictator, who had prepared the way for the imperial system.

There on the road to Misenum, high above the lovely bay, its shores strewn with the ruins of imperial splendor, still bathed in the "limpid, cloudless beauty" of which Horace sang, the grim and shapeless "Sepolchro d' Agrippina" attests the acceptance by the gods of the mother of Nero's fateful challenge:

"Let him kill me—so that he reign!"

Toward the end of a lowering afternoon, as Octavia was returning from a visit to Rubria, the head-priestess of Vesta, a great commotion arose in front of the *rostra*. As if by magic the upper end of the Forum, which had been thinly populated on account of the threatening weather, became alive with a seething multitude, and the

air was rent by loud cries of alarm, groans, shrieks and dreadful imprecations.

Forgetful of discipline, the litter bearers stopped and stared—to which perhaps they were incited by the usually stolid Marcus, who himself was gazing in wondering perplexity.

Coming from the camp on the Esquiline and bound for the palace a company of soldiers which had fought its way through the press was rapidly approaching the corner of the Tuscus, where the litter was waiting. At a gesture of acquiescence from his mistress Marcus hailed the officer in command with the lusty cry:

“Ho, Tiburtius, the Lady Octavia would know the occasion of the sudden tumult!”

Halting his troop the centurion saluted, and answered with soldierly precision:

“Word hath come from Baiæ that the freedman of the Augusta sent by her to assassinate Cæsar was detected with a dagger. The Emperor’s life was saved by Anicetus, through whose zeal also already the Augusta hath atoned with her life for the crime”; and after a moment’s pause, in the absence of further interrogation, saluted stiffly and resumed his interrupted march.

With eyes fixed and staring Octavia sat as if turned to stone, Marcus, aghast at the centurion’s curt statement, regarding her in silent dismay. Black and menacing, a heavy, low-hung cloud, shaped like a gigantic hand, was thrusting forward above the Palatine, sullen mutterings of thunder came out of the south, while the air began to vibrate its warning of the advancing rain.

Roused from her stupor by the first heavy drops pattering on the leathern hood of the *lectica*, Octavia started convulsively, and with a ghastly pretence of self-control, called to the tribune in an oddly-strained voice:

“Let us hasten, Marcus: the storm is at hand!”

TIGELLINUS

THE crime against Britannicus had been considered the only blot upon the boy-Emperor's record throughout the vaunted "*quinquennium*," or five year period, during which Seneca flattered himself that his youthful charge's evil propensities were being sterilized, so to speak, through indulgence of his lighter passions within the accepted limits of "youthful indiscretions." From his blind confidence in the efficacy of so unique a theory, the philosopher-mentor was rudely awakened by the brutal murder of Agrippina, which soon proved the precursor of other shocking deeds, ultimately including the disgrace and death of Seneca himself.

After the tragedy at Baia, Nero lingered in Campania, in doubt as to the nature of the reception which awaited him at Rome. He cherished a wholesome dread of the populace; and Burrhus had reminded him of the soldiers' loyalty to the myth of Germanicus—to which Agrippina's relationship was one degree nearer than his own.

But his fears were speedily allayed. Inspired by Burrhus—faithful albeit disgusted—the all-powerful prætorians extended their congratulations upon the Emperor's escape from the perils of his mother's treason—while his friends among the great and profligate thronged the temples and piled the altars with gifts and sacrifices expressive of their gratitude to the protecting deities. Whereupon the obsequious Senate, its ear ever to the ground, decreed that Agrippina's birthday should be regarded as an unlucky day, and that a bust of the

Emperor should be placed in the Senate house close to the golden statue of Minerva, during whose festival the conspiracy had been discovered. Nero returned in triumph, and amidst the adulation of all classes repaired to the Capitol to give thanks to the gods—then turned with eager abandon to enjoy the fruits of his industry.

But, as he explained reluctantly to the radiant Poppæa, it was not timely to take the last step with Octavia. He was aware that when the news came from Baiæ, the word “matricide” had been openly shouted in the Forum: the temper of the people was uncertain and a hostile move against the popular daughter of Claudius, dangerous under the most favorable circumstances, at that particular juncture would involve especial risk. Assured however that performance of the final clause in the contract was only a matter of time, now that the main obstacle had been removed, yielding to her ardent lover’s plea the wife of Otho abandoned her luxurious home in the Carinæ for a permanent residence in the palace.

During the next two years, his passions steadily becoming more robust and insistent under the sway of his heartless and unprincipled paramour and the gay voluptuary Petronius, who, as the “Arbiter of Taste and Morals,” had taken Otho’s place as purveyor of pleasures, Nero shocked his old preceptors by an extravagant disregard of dignity and decency. Finally, with the death of Burrhus and the downfall of Seneca, the last vestige of restraint disappeared and, its prologue completed, the grim tragedy began.

At an early stage of the system which succeeded the Roman Republic, it became apparent that the favor of the prætorians was a prerequisite to both the acquisition and the retention of the imperial office. Although nominally elected by the Senate, subject to a more or less acknowledged right on the part of Cæsar to designate his successor, no one might hope to be chosen Emperor or, once chosen, remain such unless supported by the soldiers.

Keenly alive to this fact Agrippina had induced Claudius to depart from the organization of the prætorian guard under two prefects, as instituted by Augustus, and intrust the command to Burrhus alone. Upon the latter's death Nero reverted to the former custom, which was the more popular, appointing as prefects Fenius Rufus, who was well-born, of good character and acceptable both to the guards and the people, and Sofonius Tigellinus, a man of low birth and evil repute.

Tigellinus was the son of a horse-dealer in Sicily. Twenty-five years before he had come up to Rome from Agrigentum with a consignment for the imperial stables. The handsome youth with his robust self-reliance, his ready wit and easy adaptability, attracted the attention of Caligula and his friends, from whom he received marked consideration—until under an alleged improper intimacy with Agrippina he was banished by the evil-minded Emperor.

Under the amnesty accorded by Claudius to so many of those who had suffered from his nephew's malevolence, Tigellinus returned to Rome and shortly inherited a considerable fortune from his father, who had been a successful purveyor to the "Green" faction. Raised to the equestrian rank through enrollment by the Censor in the corps of equites—which had lost its traditional patrician character in favor of wealth—he served the requisite five years. Shortly after the death of Agrippina, through his knowledge of horses he came into the good graces of Nero, then in the throes of his passion for driving a chariot; and still further commending himself as an adept in every kind of debauchery and vice, he speedily became the power behind the throne, and as such largely responsible for his imperial master's most infamous deeds. His elevation to power was the death knell of virtue in Roman public life—as it also doomed the family of Augustus to extinction.

It was to Tigellinus that Poppæa finally had recourse, in despair of herself inducing Nero to fulfill his engage-

ment in regard to Octavia. Although an alliance with this lowborn, vulgar adventurer was extremely distasteful to the haughty patrician woman, with her strong caste prejudices, in his unscrupulousness, his masterful sense of power, and his commanding influence over Nero, she divined the requisite attributes of a successful intermediary.

As it happened the prefect himself opportunely opened the way to her overtures. Restive under the division of authority at the camp, he resolved to enlist Poppæa's aid in persuading Nero to remove Rufus, and incidentally take a long step forward in his quest of power by assisting her to realize her own ambitions.

"Why shouldst thou, the most beautiful woman in Rome, qualified by birth and accomplishments to be Cæsar's consort, and as he himself proudly hints, already in the way of proof that through thee the Augustan line shall be perpetuated—why indeed shouldst thou longer be subject to humiliation as Cæsar's mistress, while his despised and barren wife flaunts her legal rights and stirs the people to regard thee with contempt?"

"And why should thy power and influence be curtailed through association of Fenius Rufus in the prefecture?" Poppæa smilingly interjected.

"I myself would have observed it hadst not forestalled me," said the prefect coolly. "Moreover, success in thy design against Octavia would be endangered if Rufus, who was Agrippina's friend, is left in a position where covertly the prætorians might be corrupted. Cæsar's mother took no such chances. Before she struck Claudius, Burrhus had been given full command at the camp, and when the Emperor's death was proclaimed the prætorians, sword in hand, were at the gates to shout for Nero. That same support may not come amiss, for thyself as well as Cæsar, when Octavia falls."

Poppæa's delicately pencilled eyebrows drew together in the faintest semblance of a frown at the prefect's final

insinuation—until, as if in impulsive remonstrance at such display of emotion, she drew the tips of the fingers of each hand softly across her forehead, in either direction. Infinitely more terrifying than the idea of an angry Roman mob was the thought of a premature wrinkle to the vain beauty who sedulously practiced every known art to resist the assaults of the years upon her charms—for whose daily bath the milk of five hundred she-asses was barely sufficient, and who, not fancying her appearance in a mirror one day, prayed that she might die before passing her prime!

“Thou shouldst have said *if*—not *when* Octavia falls,” she observed sarcastically. “Cæsar seems to fear that timid, passionless, white-faced creature, who should have been a Vestal, more than he does the shade of his mother. Already twice hath he set out to strangle her—and each time his courage failed.”

Tigellinus laughed harshly, as he rejoined with a sneer, “Cæsar would shrink from strangling a puppy unless its jaws and legs were bound. But he has servants to do his bidding and easily may be moved to command their services when occasion arises. For thy purposes, however, such is not necessary in Octavia’s case: in truth, as matters are, I myself would advise against it. The daughter of Claudius hath some strange hold upon the people and the guards as well; it were easy to rouse the prætorians in her behalf.

“The safer way would be to persuade Cæsar that the only danger in striking at Octavia is that under cover of avenging her wrongs an attempt might be made to supplant him with Plautus or Faustus Sylla; and to that fear already is he predisposed. Thus after the grandson of Tiberius and the husband of Antonia shall have been sent to Hades, and his trusted Tigellinus alone responsible for the loyalty of the guards, his fears will take wing and he will readily consent to repudiate Octavia—which for the time being at least should suffice for thy ends.

"Come: shall it be understood between us? Thy task the removal of Rufus—and all the rest mine. Afterwards thou wilt be the Augusta—and together we may rule Rome!"

Poppæa's eyes sparkled as she answered eagerly, "Fenius shall go at once: and when shall thy part be accomplished?"

"Time will be required," he answered carelessly, "since Sylla is in Gaul and Plautus in Syria, and we must move cautiously that their friends may have no warning. But cherish no fear: fulfill thine own part, and before the Kalends of March thou shalt don the marriage veil"; and with a coarse laugh he left the room.

Poppæa's share in the undertaking not only proved easier than she had anticipated, but the method of its accomplishment effectively opened the way for Tigellinus to perform his part.

At the time of their compact Nero was in Antium inspecting some improvements to Agrippina's villa, which as the place of his own birth, he designed for Poppæa's use when the gods should vouchsafe him an heir.

Returning a few days later he came to Poppæa in a high rage: a number of "informations" had been lodged that various obscure persons declared he had murdered his mother. But his hands were tied, since to take action would bring added reproach upon him by making the rumor more widespread—which Tigellinus insisted was the real object of those behind the informers.

Poppæa made instant use of the opening:

"'Tis thyself art to blame, in that thou didst foolishly appoint Rufus to the prefecture," she said warmly. "What canst expect of the people while a friend of Agrippina shares command of the prætorians? Today it is only the obscure who are whispering: have a care lest tomorrow Agrippina's more powerful friends are not shouting it aloud!"

Pale with fury, Nero dashed from the room, and within

a few hours the news spread that Rufus had been deposed and the supreme command confirmed in Tigellinus.

It remained for the latter only to play upon Nero's fears by reminding him of the high birth of Plautus and Sylla—the former a descendant of Augustus, the latter in the direct Julian line, and as well the husband of Antonia, half-sister to Octavia; of the fact that in her lifetime Agrippina had been suspected of plotting in behalf of Plautus, and that for either Sylla in Gaul or Plautus in the East ready opportunities might occur to corrupt the armies and start an insurrection.

Six days later the assassins landed at Marseilles and the slothful and indigent descendant of the republican dictator, who had as much thought of a rebellion as of embracing the new Hebrew religion, was slain as he was sitting down to dinner. A fortnight later at his home in Syria, to which he had been banished four years earlier, the same fate overtook Plautus—with the exception of Nero himself the last male descendant of the Empress Livia—who was struck down by the centurion while engaged in bodily labor upon his estate.

Despite the precautions of Tigellinus, through the zeal of one of his freedmen in Rome, who under a favoring wind outsailed the centurion and his band, Plautus had word of their coming. But the young prince refused to escape—accepting death as “preferable to a life of anxiety and alarm.”

“Now at last mayst thou sleep in peace, and choose thine own wife and successor,” observed the prefect blandly, as he disclosed in turn the gory heads of the victims to the gloating eyes of the imperial assassin, who thereupon sent word to the Senate that through the loyal zeal of the prætorian prefect the peace of the commonwealth had been preserved by the destruction of these “turbulent spirits.” Whereupon public processions and devotions were decreed to the deities, and Sylla and Plautus were degraded from the dignity of Senators.

On a morning in February, in the eighth year of Nero's reign, Octavia was sitting in the lofty *solarium* or terrace on the flat roof of her apartment in the palace wing, overlooking the valley toward the west and south and the rising slopes beyond.

During the winter months when the weather was fine this was her favorite retiring place for reading and meditation. Partly roofed over, and otherwise protected from the wind by movable screens, she had at once impressed it with a more familiar air and a semblance of her own personality by assembling quantities of her favorite plants and shrubs in tubs and boxes along the outer railings; an innovation which at the time was coming into general use on the roofs of the public colonnades as well as the balconies and upper stories of both private houses and *insulæ* in the imperial city. Literally a place for basking in the sun, in effect it was an out-of-doors boudoir, its southern exposure inviting the beaming rays and genial warmth which streamed in upon her from a cloudless sky as she reclined in a cushioned *cathedra supina*—resembling a modern steamer chair—re-reading her last letter from Pomponia.

Nearly three years had elapsed since the departure of Aulus and the matron, with which the death of Agrippina had been coincident. Outwardly uneventful to Octavia, it had been a period of deep import in respect of her inner life. Shocked beyond measure by her stepmother's terrible end, at first she remained in apathetic expectancy of her own violent death at the hand of her besotted husband. But as time passed, with the blooming Poppæa complacently established at Nero's side, each of them apparently oblivious of her own existence at the other end of the palace, her apprehensions gave way to a sense of security, in the consciousness of which she realized for the first time how terrifying the thought of death actually had been.

Just at that moment had come the first letter from Pomponia, written after their arrival at Corinth. To the

matron's intense disappointment the priest of Christus had left the city on an indeterminate journey. But the Roman Governor of Achæa had accorded them every courtesy; and through his kindly assistance and certain introductions brought from home, she had found and met familiarly the most intimate friends of the preacher.

Notably among the latter was a Greek woman of charm and culture named Phebe, to whom had been entrusted for delivery a wonderful *epistola* indited by Paul to the Romans, which Pomponia had been privileged to read, and a copy of which Phebe, who was about leaving for Rome, had engaged that Octavia also should receive.

The news of Agrippina's death, which had overtaken them, had confirmed Aulus in favor of an extended absence from Rome: and more than ever desirous of meeting Paul, she had joyfully assented to her husband's proposition that at least they should stay away and travel "so long and so far as may be necessary to run down the elusive priest!"

Other letters had followed at lengthening intervals, recounting their wanderings in the footsteps of the preacher; first by land through Macedonia to Philippi, thence by sea around the archipelago, stopping at various ports, to Ptolemais in Syria, and again on land to Cæsarea and up to Jerusalem, where at last their quest was successful.

In the rioting before the temple, which nearly cost Paul his life, Aulus had been thrown down and trampled upon, resulting in broken bones and other serious injuries. But he had been instrumental in warning Claudius Lysias, the local representative of the procurator in Judæa, of the plot to kill Paul. The tribune promptly intervened and under a strong military escort sent the preacher down to the Governor in Cæsarea.

Aulus was confined to his bed many weary months, and it was not until the following summer that Octavia received the welcome news of his recovery. Her friends had been gladdened by the unexpected arrival in Jerusalem

of Porcius Festus, the new Governor of Judæa. An old friend of Aulus, he had urged them to pay him a visit before returning to Rome. A week later they had followed him to the coast, and were present when Paul made his memorable defence against the accusation of Ananias, the high priest, before Festus, Agrippa, grandson of the great Herod, and his sister the beautiful and wayward Berenice. The prisoner's final appeal to Cæsar as a Roman citizen had resulted in his being remanded to Rome.

Finally Pomponia had written in great distress that Aulus had succumbed to a low fever, which would protract their stay indefinitely. Greatly disappointed at not being able to sail on the ship with Paul, she was also very anxious about her husband. But for herself, she had found "perfect peace": all her uncertainties and doubts had been resolved by the inspired preacher and certain of those in Jerusalem who had known the Christus. Paul had sailed late in August, under charge of the centurion Julius, who was acquainted with Marcus, to whom he would send word as soon as they reached port, which might be expected in October.

"And may the blessed Christus grant," she wrote in conclusion, "that in the coming of the great preacher the God of love and mercy and patience and consolation may be revealed to thee. Then indeed, as Paul hath written, thou shalt find that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which is revealed to us."

This was the letter Octavia had been reading; and brooding dreamily over the closing lines, the eventful experiences of the past three years recurred to her mind in pictured retrospection.

Early in the first summer Phebe had arrived with the precious missive. Predisposed in each other's favor by the commendations of Pomponia, although the Greek woman's stay in Rome was brief their acquaintance had ripened into a fast friendship.

Through Phebe she had met many who had accepted the new faith, including certain of those to whom Paul had sent special greetings. The greater part were either Greeks who had come from the eastern provinces, or Hebrews who had returned to their homes after revocation of the edict of Claudius under which all Jews had been banished from Rome. Most of them had met and talked with Paul.

Among the comparatively few of her own race who were enrolled, she had seen much of a woman named Lucilla whose husband was of equestrian rank, and her son Rufus, who had served in the corps of the equites, and was about to enroll in the guards. On several occasions she had accompanied them to the secret night meetings of the faithful, in the Ghetto beyond the Tiber, or in the quarries outside the Porta Nomentana. From these mystic gatherings occasionally she returned in a state of strange exhilaration, at other times under even greater perplexity and doubt.

Throughout the long period persistently she re-read and meditated upon Paul's *epistola*, of which she had copies both in the original Greek and a Latin translation. Although with some parts she became deeply impressed, much of it was beyond her comprehension; and certain harsh passages seemed to her in strange contradiction of Pomponia's conception of the forbearance, gentleness and mercy of the new religion. And it shocked her to read that with Paul's god there was "no respect of persons": she was not ready to accept the idea that she herself, with her patrician inheritance, was of no more consequence in the eye of God than the vilest and most illiterate slave.

But to her troubled and harassed soul one passage stood out in sharp relief through its appeal to her passionate longing for the comfort, support and encouragement of some supernatural power: the emphatic assertion that for the chosen ones—"the elect"—"Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers nor things

present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

To the burning question how she might qualify for this wonderful boon—from whom she might receive the necessary absolution, and the assurance of her "election," she had found no answer in the experience of these others, who when hard pressed fell back alone upon their "faith," a term unknown to her pagan cult.

Thus more and more interested in all these disclosures, and deeply imbued with the doctrines of the new religion, she had been anxiously awaiting news of Paul's arrival in the hope that, as in Pomponia's case, through the inspired teacher her own doubts and uncertainties would be dispelled. And now nearly three months overdue, in common with the others she began to fear some disaster had overtaken Paul and that in this, as in other critical junctures of her life, her hopes were to be shattered by the implacable Fates.

Accompanied by Marcus and the old nurse Eunice, Pythias had gone that morning to inspect a new contingent of Molossian dogs, offspring in the third generation of the pair presented to her by Junius nearly twenty years before—under agreement to return promptly for the midday meal, after which they were bound for the villa to deliver certain instructions from Pomponia to the overseer in regard to the garden. Roused from her meditation by the sound of excited voices which floated up from below, Octavia suddenly became conscious of the flight of time. As she was rising hurriedly, Pythias darted through the doorway, white-faced and affrighted, crying breathlessly,

"The prætorian prefect and the Emperor's Secretary are below enquiring for thee. Marcus offered to take their message, but Tigellinus insists he must deliver it in person. Oh, I am so terrified! What can it mean?"

Octavia's own heart contracted painfully. But through long suffering she had become adept in concealing her

emotions; and under the sway of her final reflection upon the fateful outcome of Paul's journey, and with all the old pagan fatalism, she answered calmly:

"'Tis as the gods have determined. I will see him at once. Go thou in advance and instruct Marcus to escort them to the atrium, where also thou shalt attend. And guard carefully thy demeanor, that no suspicion of fear or disquietude may be aroused."

A few moments later Octavia entered the atrium, where the others were assembled, and seating herself upon a cushioned *cathedra*, tranquilly indicated her readiness to receive the Emperor's communication.

Saluting respectfully, Tigellinus advanced and presented a parchment scroll. With calm deliberation and unshaking hands, Octavia cut the purple cords and read with an impassive face, the prefect regarding her curiously, Pythias at her side, with hands clasped tightly and an expression of anxious concern which in vain she attempted to dissemble, Marcus standing near the doorway with arms folded and eyes bent on the floor.

"Thou knowest the contents of the scroll?" said Octavia with quiet dignity.

The prefect bowed gravely.

"And 'tis not commanded the matter shalt remain secret?" she inquired.

Tigellinus replied in the negative.

"On the ground that I have borne him no children, Cæsar hath divorced me," said Octavia, in a tone of such manifest satisfaction, if not actually of triumph, that Tigellinus stared in undisguised amazement, while Pythias turned hastily to hide her conflicting emotions.

"He hath broken the nuptial tablets," Octavia continued, referring to the parchment, "and in studied compliance with the requirements of the Julian law hath signed and sealed the *repudium* in the presence of seven witnesses." Then rising she proudly concluded:

"Thou wilt say the daughter of Claudius accepts

Cæsar's determination: and if thou hast no further commands, thou mayst withdraw."

"It is not meet thou shouldst remain in the house of thy former husband after divorce," he answered with a covert smile. "The estate of Plautus for thy support and, as a dwelling place, the house of Burrhus have been assigned to thee, and my orders are to escort thee to the latter."

"Am I expected to depart at once?" she inquired, with a slight frown. "And my *familia*—and guard: do they remain with me?"

"The house on the Esquiline hath not appointments for so many," the prefect answered. "I would advise thou shouldst select a few to accompany thee now, and later the requisite number may be definitely determined. All the others, and thy possessions in the palace as well, shall be safeguarded here until disposed of at thy convenience. As for the guard, I have no orders," he concluded with what in anyone but Tigellinus would have been a show of confusion.

There was a moment of dramatic silence—broken at last by Octavia, who said with feeling:

"The tribune hath been with me since I was a child, and I should miss him sorely. But 'tis for thee to determine," she added coldly.

The prefect hesitated. He was aware of the high repute enjoyed by Marcus, particularly among the prætorians: neither the friendly regard nor the hostility of the tribune was to be despised. Moreover, he had been nonplussed by Octavia's strange elation, which was entirely beyond his coarse comprehension: who could say what influences might be behind her? For the moment a little leniency and consideration might not be impolitic, and could be easily justified to Cæsar.

"Let it be as thou desirest," he said graciously. "Thou shalt take the tribune and four of the guards." Then under a sudden impulse—which with Tigellinus usually

meant a quick intuition—he turned to Marcus and said genially:

“Instead of myself escorting the Lady Octavia, I intrust her to thy care and, as heretofore, thou shalt be responsible for her safety to Cæsar,” with a significant lift of the eyebrows, from which the tribune clearly comprehended that thereafter his real function would be that of a jailor. But he saluted stolidly, and after a final suggestion that Octavia would be expected at her new home before the sunset, with a low bow Tigellinus withdrew, closely attended by the cringing Epaphroditus.

From her watching place in one of the screened balconies Poppæa, with flushed cheeks and eyes aglow, eagerly followed the little procession as it emerged from the courtyard and disappeared around the bend in the direction of the Vicus Apollinus. And in the unrestrained ardor of her subsequent greeting the cowardly and brutal son of Agrippina found momentary forgetfulness from the fears which oppressed him at thought of the possible consequences of his act.

SPES REDIVIVA

THE way thus finally open to the summit of her ambitions, Poppæa was eager to complete the last stage in the ascent.

If left to herself alone the nuptials would have been celebrated immediately after the divorce. To that suggestion, however, Nero demurred. Not that his ardor had cooled or his purpose changed. But the attitude of the people still was to be disclosed. The ghost of Agrippina, which almost nightly disturbed his dreams, might become even more fearsome if encouraged by a renewal of the cries of "matricide" in the Forum.

Moreover, the *Dies parentales*, a festival in honor of deceased relatives, fell on the thirteenth and continued until the twentieth of the month: the superstitious and at times remorseful son of Agrippina hesitated to provoke the *manes* of his mother by nuptial festivities during that period. And since the first half of March was considered unlucky for marriages, he insisted that the event must be deferred until after the Ides.

Although Poppæa strenuously objected, Nero was obstinate, while even Tigellinus advised delay until the force of any popular discontent should have spent itself, or at least have been fully measured. But after the lapse of a week unmarked by either outbreak or whispered menace, the Emperor's fears subsided; and upon the prefect's assurance that all danger had passed, on the day following the close of the festival—twelve days after the divorce—

the marriage was solemnized with great pomp and magnificence.

In the first flush of victory Poppæa was radiantly happy. Never had she appeared more beautiful or captivating to the enamored Nero. Unlike Agrippina, she had not the slightest wish to interfere in State affairs. Her one ambition was to rule the Emperor, and incidentally insure the highest possible gratification of her boundless vanity and craving for admiration.

But while in this respect Nero and the Augustians—the band of salaried flatterers with whom he had surrounded himself—fulfilled her most exacting desires, the popular acclaim which she also coveted and had expected was noticeably wanting. Aside from such perfunctory applause as the palace livery always excited, her appearance in public occasioned no more enthusiasm than formerly; while that of Octavia was marked by one continuous ovation—none the less pronounced since her removal from the palace.

One sunny afternoon in March, as Poppæa's gorgeous litter swept down the *Sacra Via* into the Forum, some hired *claquers* scattered through the crowd in front of the Temple of Cæsar, at a preconcerted signal cried in unison,

“*Vah! Poppæa Sabina! Salve Augusta!*” (Hail to the Empress!)

As Poppæa leaned forward to smile her acknowledgments a stentorian voice shouted derisively:

“How can that be while Crispinus and Otho are both alive and Sabina undivorced from either?”

The sally was greeted with loud laughter, in the midst of which some wag cried mischievously, “To the Tiber with the lying *nomenclators*”; and with a roar of delight the spectators turned upon the hirelings, who fled in terror.

Pale with anger and alarm, Poppæa withdrew behind the curtains, and at her command the litter turned and retraced its way up the slope, the crowd shouting glee-

fully, "*Vale! Sabina! Salve Octavia!* Hail to the daughter of Germanicus!"

Tigellinus, who was hastily summoned, shook his head at Poppæa's tearful and impassioned recital.

"The woman must go," he said grimly. "There is no real danger, but living in Rome always she will be a rallying point for the disaffected. Leave all to me. Already I have found among her attendants one who will aid in what I have projected. It will be matter of a few days only. Meanwhile say not a word—even to Cæsar."

A full month had passed since the memorable visit of Tigellinus. When in the glory of the declining sun Octavia had entered the waiting litter and, as she fondly hoped, turned her back forever upon the Palatine, with the receding shadows of the frowning palace the nameless dread and terror it inspired, which, like some impalpable, resistless burden always had borne her down, gradually fell away. Instead of a blow, Nero's act had come to her as a blessing; and its immediate consequence was like a discharge from prison rather than a banishment from home.

Even the thought of leaving the little garden occasioned no regret: its memories were linked too closely with so many of the tragic events in her life. It was there she had learned from Eos of her mother's shame. There also she had been awakened from her dream of happiness by the news of her lover's unmerited disgrace. There she had spent the last bitter hours of her maidenhood—preceding the marriage regarded by her as a sacrilege. And there so often she had brooded in sombre misery and despair after the deaths in turn of her father and brother.

In the glad conviction that she was forever free from the domination of her brutal and despised husband, she had taken up her new life in the unpretentious house on the Esquiline with a measure of peaceful contentment which bordered closely on happiness. And in the deeper

relief and sense of security occasioned by the imperial marriage, she said impulsively to Pythias,

“Now if only there might come assurance of Paul’s safety and some word from Junius, there would not be a cloud in the sky!”

“If for thy happiness the gods would vouchsafe the first, the other might wait,” said Pythias stoutly: although the wistful look in her eyes left no doubt as to her real emotions at this reference to Varus, of whom nothing had been heard in months.

But generously subordinating her own feelings and desires, in her elation over the wonderful change in Octavia, Pythias had regained all her native gaiety and high spirits. Almost daily she had been going back and forth between the Palatine and the Esquiline in the multifarious preparations for ultimate disposal of such personal effects and those individuals of the *familia* as would no longer be required by Octavia; and in the happy consciousness of service, fought down her own anxieties. And her happiness was complete when during their afternoon excursions about the city the friendly populace swarmed about the litter and paid tumultuous homage to Octavia.

Marcus alone appeared unresponsive to these happier conditions, and although the vivacious young woman practiced all her arts, she attained only momentary success in her efforts to break down the strange gravity which had become habitual with him. She might not have rallied him so mercilessly if aware that he was under orders to report daily to the prefect everything which transpired with respect to his charge; and that the real cause of his disquietude was not, as she carelessly assumed, his lessened authority and importance, but the fact that Octavia was virtually a prisoner, under constant surveillance, and his growing conviction that something far worse was impending.

But there came a day when the tribune presented him-

self with such unwonted buoyancy and elation that before he could open his lips, with flushed cheeks and wildly beating heart Pythias ran to Octavia, crying eagerly,

"O come quickly! Marcus is here with the air of a *triumphator*! Something wonderful hath happened!" and she fairly dragged the other to the atrium.

"I have news which will gladden your hearts," he said with the old ring in his voice. "Paul hath landed safely! While making for Brundisium they were blown out of their course and shipwrecked on an island far to the south. Three months later they caught a transport in the Sicilian coast trade, and after touching at Rhegium finally disembarked at Puteoli. Julius writes they will rest there several days before setting out for Rome.

"But someone else actually hath come—thou couldst never guess"—turning to Pythias, who went white and threw herself upon Octavia's shoulder with an inarticulate cry.

"And is all well with him, Marcus?" said Octavia earnestly.

"Thou wouldst think so to see and hear him," the tribune answered. "'Twas a long, hard journey, from the Euphrates up through Cappadocia and Bithynia to Byzantium, and thence down to the sea, and he is lean and travel-worn—but tough as a spear handle and eager as a boy. He hath three months' leave, beginning today, and vows by all the gods that before it ends, if necessary he will play the old game of his forbears with the Sabine women," grinning broadly at Pythias, who did not trust herself to speak as Octavia whispered caressingly, "I am so glad for thee, *cara*!"

"He was counting upon surprising us," Marcus continued, "and it was only by chance I met him coming through the Tuscus. After delivery of his dispatches he will go to the camp and await my coming with word when thou wilt receive him."

"Let it be at once—lose not a moment," said Octavia

rising: but as Pythias darted from the room, she detained him with the whispered question:

“Is there anything more about Paul?”

“Only that Julius praiseth him highly, declaring that but for his wisdom and courage all on board, of whom there were nearly three hundred, would have been lost, although the preacher himself ascribed their safety alone to the power of his god”; adding in a low voice as he glanced cautiously about:

“Julius wrote that Paul sent greetings to and invoked the mercy of the Christus upon the friends who had been particularly commended to him by Pomponia”: and after a moment of silence, with one swift, appraising glance at the unobservant Octavia with parted lips and eyes alight standing motionless in rapt wonder and exaltation, the tribune silently withdrew, his whole being in the throes of a mad contention between the old lurking fears and a new unreasoning hope which the return of his friend and the coming of Paul had aroused.

The arrival of Junius was succeeded by three days of almost continuous rain. But the hours had passed swiftly for the four friends in their happy reunion, and the absorbing interest with which the others had listened to the young officer's vivid narrative of his five years' absence in the East. Although he passed lightly over the darker phases of the story, his auditors apprehended something of the terrible hardships of the long campaign—particularly during that dreadful winter of tent-life in the deep snows, when only the example and fortitude of the general himself, living and laboring shoulder to shoulder with his men, saved them from complete demoralization.

Finding the army greatly disorganized when he assumed command, Corbulo spent the greater part of two years in restoring discipline, which had been sadly impaired by protracted residence in the effeminate Syrian cities. When at last assured of his troops, he had advanced, defeated Tiridates and destroyed his capital.

Twice they had traversed the entire length of Armenia, and finally surrendering command in the province to Tigranes, who had been sent from Rome for that purpose, Corbulo took his stand on the distant Euphrates, as a barrier against the Parthians. It was from thence Junius had set out for Rome, called home to provide for administration of a large landed estate to which he had fallen heir from an old uncle.

But as he confided to Octavia, in the main his return had proceeded from a determination to make one supreme effort to induce Pythias to marry him: failing in which, he would resign himself to an indefinite stay in the East. Full of sympathy, Octavia engaged to afford him the earliest possible opportunity to press his suit, either under cover of an excursion to Tibur or a day spent at Pomponia's villa.

Restive under the continued postponement of their plan, as a result of the inclement weather, the ardent young man soon wearied of his task as "story teller," and protested vigorously against the persistent questionings to which he was subjected.

"Now, Minerva, hear me, I have no more to tell," he exclaimed irritably to Pythias at the close of a long afternoon as they sat by the brazier, with the rain beating against the casement and the wind shrieking through the portico. "If thou wouldst learn more, go with me before the Flamens: afterwards, if so minded, we can retrace the journey step by step and thou mayst learn at first hand."

Pythias only tossed her head, at which Marcus said with a drawl:

"No hardships of travel or of camp life for the little lady. 'Tis a house in the Carinæ and the purple border of a magistrate's robe alone may win her: no mere military tribune with a tent on the Euphrates need apply!"

"'Tis false," she cried with challenging eyes: "and I loved a man, I would follow him to the mud hut of a barbarian in the forest!"

"That may become the last resort if thou delayest much longer," said Octavia slyly; at which Junius flashed her a grateful look, while Pythias turned aside in sudden confusion.

But on the day before the Ides the gods of the weather relented; the rain ceased, the winds died away, and after an ineffective struggle against the sun's insistent march, the sullen clouds gradually retreated beyond the Alban hills. It was too late for Tibur, but following a hasty *prandium* the little party set out gaily for the villa.

"Go thou with the others through the wood—there will be wild flowers to gather," Octavia suggested as the carriage turned into the lane: and as Pythias leaped down in prompt compliance and ran up the winding path, she whispered to Marcus, "Easily thou mayst find a way to leave them."

"Already it hath presented itself," he answered with a grin, pointing to Junius disappearing around the bend in rapid pursuit.

Two hours later, lounging in the warm sunshine on the terrace, where the pigeons were swarming in noisy solicitation, Marcus saw them emerging slowly from the wood. Disregarding the appeal of her feathered friends, Pythias ran into the house, where Octavia was busy with the domestics, while Junius strode towards him with outstretched hand and voice of deep-toned elation.

"'Tis all arranged—we are to be married on the Kalends of April!" And after they had embraced jovially, with boyish eagerness he unfolded his plans.

He would resign from the army, having taken the precaution to supply himself with a letter from Corbulo recommending his discharge; and the word of the victorious general—whose rare ability ultimately gained for him the same broad authority conferred upon Pompey in the war against the pirates—would be potent.

Included in his inheritance were a charming villa at Cumæ, and an extensive Sabine farm over beyond Tibur.

With Octavia as their guest they would go first to the villa, and thence for a long stay at the farm. Later they might visit Greece, for which Pythias confessed a longing. She had stipulated only for Octavia's approval—of which he had every reason to feel confident.

It was all very beautiful, and Marcus was unreserved in his felicitations. And yet, strive as he might, all the overflowing gaiety and high spirits of his friends could not overcome his instinctive fears or dispel the shadow of impending misfortune which had come back to him during his solitary musings on the terrace.

Not a truant cloud flecked the sky, or faintest whisper from Æolus trespassed upon the stillness of the rarely beautiful evening as they wound down through the plane trees and emerged from the wooded road upon the Appian Way, flooded with the golden radiance of the declining sun.

When they changed to the waiting litters at the Porta Capena the shadows had begun to fall: and in the gathering twilight and the silence which as if by common consent, attended its coming—the lovers, content with occasional furtive glances, and Octavia absorbed in thoughts of Paul, whose coming now should be only a matter of days—the tribune was free to indulge unnoticed in his sombre reflections. Out of the past came a vision of that other return from the villa—on the day when it was Octavia and his friend Lucius who had been glorified—and the terrible after-event. Had the relentless Furies in truth exhausted their malevolence?

THE MAMERTINE PRISON

THE Ides of March dawned fair and beautiful. But when in jubilant anticipation of the day's delights Junius appeared at an early hour, he was chagrined to learn that the projected excursion to Tibur had been abandoned. Moreover, Pythias would not see him, either then or at any later hour that day—and without even softening her refusal by pretence of indisposition.

Moved by his crestfallen appearance Octavia said kindly:

“Thou must be patient and treat her with forbearance. She is frankly distressed by what she considers a too-hasty surrender, reproaching herself for disloyalty to me: thou knowest her years of unselfish devotion. Although uncalled for, her disquietude is real and for the moment it were wise to humor her. Take Marcus away for the day and together renew some of the old associations—for which there will be fewer opportunities as the Kalends of April approach—” with a significant smile.

“May the gods requite thee,” he answered fervently. “What sayst, Marcus? Wilt accept banishment, and in my company pour a few libations to Bacchus?”

“Art sure thou wilt not need me?” said the tribune dubiously.

“Thine absence will be a relief,” Octavia replied, laughing: “we shall not leave the house today and thou art free until the morning. Then, if the weather is fair and, as I trust, all proves well”—with a meaning glance at Junius—“be prepared for an early start for Tibur”; and she dismissed them graciously.

At about the twelfth hour, as Pythias was rearranging with tender solicitude a cluster of crimson roses which Junius had sent, an attendant entered hastily with word that the slave girl Eos desired to see her mistress. With an expression of annoyance Pythias turned from the flowers, saying to the *cubicularius*,

"I will see her: do not disturb the Lady Octavia." The mere mention of the Greek girl's name never failed to provoke her hostility, and she had considered it as not the least of their good fortune that at her earnest solicitation Eos had not been included among those attendants who had accompanied them to the Esquiline. She was still at the palace with the remainder of the slave *familia*, upon most of whom Octavia intended ultimately to bestow the gift of manumission.

Pythias sought the anteroom with a vague uneasiness, which mounted to instant alarm when she encountered the prætorian prefect and the Emperor's Secretary, with Eos, accompanied by a centurion standing in the background.

"Why didst not send the names of these others?" she said sharply, to the disturbed *cubicularius*.

"'Twas by my direction," the prefect interposed rudely; "Where is Octavia?"

"She is preoccupied, having slept but little last night, and I came to learn what Eos wanted," she answered evasively.

"The summons was for her—not thee: let her be called at once," he rejoined harshly.

Trembling visibly, with eyes roving and blanched lips, the terrified girl essayed to speak further; but seizing her by the arm Tigellinus shouted brutally:

"Get thee hence and bring her instantly, or by the hundred-headed beast of Hades myself will drag her from the slothful bed where I misdoubt her vile paramour hath detained her!"

Staggering as if from a heavy blow, with eyes wildly

dilated, she was groping her way to the doorway when Octavia herself appeared in the opening. With a low, incoherent cry Pythias stretched out her hands imploringly and would have fallen but for her friend's quick support.

"What hast thou done to her," she exclaimed passionately, with eyes bent fearlessly upon the dark-faced scowling prefect. "And why are these intruders here without my permission?" she demanded imperiously of the major-domo, cowering in the corner.

"I am here by the power of Cæsar, to whom thy infamous conduct hath been disclosed," Tigellinus snarled; "and 'tis the dread of punishment hath stricken this shameless accomplice in thy misdeeds."

There was a moment of tense silence. Withdrawing her eyes from the prefect in a desperate struggle to maintain her composure, Octavia for the first time noticed the presence of Eos. As the colloquy proceeded, disregarding her pretense of compulsion and fear, the slave girl crept forward to a position close to Tigellinus, where she crouched, listening with breathless interest. While the prefect was speaking her eyes were riveted on her mistress, whose searching gaze she now intercepted and returned with a bold stare of defiance.

As Octavia caught the Greek girl's malevolent expression and noted her air of vindictive triumph, Acte's report that "some woman in the palace" had instigated the charge against Pomponia, and Agrippina's emphatic assertion that Eos was the guilty one, suddenly recurred to her mind. Painfully conscious of her failure to overcome the girl's bitter and hostile spirit, she had reluctantly accepted the conclusion which Pythias always had maintained: that the crippled slave's hatred of Messalina as the cause of her deformity had been transferred to herself. Thus, as Agrippina had shrewdly reasoned, an attack upon those her mistress loved would be food for her revenge until she might effectively strike a more direct

blow, against which Octavia's stepmother had warned her. Aware of her associations with the believers in the new faith, Eos had found her opportunity in the Emperor's repudiation of his wife and the latter's removal from the palace, and at last had gone with her charges to the *delatores*.

Here was the obvious explanation of what had occurred, and under the relief which the thought occasioned Octavia completely regained her self-possession. Two years earlier a charge of "false worship" would have shocked her terribly. But during the interval her affiliation with the worshippers of the Christus, the letters and experiences of Pomponia, and her constant study of the *Epistola*—upon all of which she had reflected deeply—with the crowning wonder of that simple message and benediction from Paul which had flooded her soul with strange ecstasy—had wrought a great change in her previous conception that observance of the State religion was an integral part of her duty to the State. And under the momentary feeling of elation excited by the mental picture of humiliation and suffering to which she might be subjected in punishment of her supposed apostasy, subconsciously she was taking the first positive step into the temple of that strange new faith at the threshold of which she had been so long standing irresolutely.

"Why hast thou brought this slave girl with thee?" she inquired of Tigellinus in a tone so devoid of anger or reproach that Pythias raised her head in wonder.

"I have brought her to confound thee by her testimony," the prefect answered coldly. "Thy slaves at the palace have been examined, and while some pleaded ignorance and others made only partial admissions, this one, at first contumacious, under persuasion of the leaden balls and the corded arm—with a final hint of the rack—hath confessed everything. For thy vile practices, whilst yet the wife of Cæsar, thou art adjudged guilty of treason

against the Emperor—in the exercise of whose leniency, however, thou art sentenced only to banishment.”

“And for what alleged crime am I thus adjudged and to be punished?” she inquired with a slightly puzzled look but without observable emotion.

“Thou knowest well ’tis adultery with Eucerus, the Egyptian flute-player, who of late haunted thine apartments in the palace, and yet visits thee here,” he answered with a coarse sneer.

With downcast eyes, a delicate flush which suffused the ivory hue of her complexion attesting the acuteness of her shame, Octavia stood like a marble figure; while Pythias, with ashen face and distorted features, darted forward with upraised arms, screaming hysterically.

“Thou infamous wretch! Thy filthy tongue shall be torn from thy lying lips and thy body thrown to the beasts! Summon the guards!” she shouted frantically to the *ostiarius*.

Tigellinus laughed scornfully:

“The ‘guards’ thou wouldst summon are a body of mine own prætorians, who have taken possession of the vestibule. And thyself, little *meretrix*, wouldst best have a care, lest for thee too it shall be a case of ‘thumbs down’—since also hath it been freely disclosed by the lame girl that it was through thine own earlier misdoing with the flute-player he found his way to the embraces of Cæsar’s wife!”

With a hoarse cry Pythias threw herself upon the unsuspecting Eos, and catching her by the hair savagely jerked her to the floor: then falling to her knees she struck and tore at the hated face with the ferocity of an enraged dog. Screaming in agony the hapless girl was in danger of serious disfigurement before the centurion, at a sign from Tigellinus, who for a time looked on in brutal enjoyment, dragged Pythias away from her victim.

“*Certe* she hath the fighting spirit,” observed the

prefect grimly. "'Tis plain that for the most her lovers have been chosen from the gladiators!"

Struggling desperately, Pythias had just regained her feet. As the centurion stepped aside she stooped quickly and snatching from the belt of Epaphroditus, who was bending over the moaning Eos, the knife which, as Secretary to the Emperor, he was privileged to carry, she hurled herself at the prefect and struck blindly. The keen weapon pierced the fleshy part of the arm which instinctively he threw in front of his breast, and the blood spurted freely. With a frightful imprecation Tigellinus swung his other arm viciously and she crashed to the floor unconscious.

"Quick! Bind up the wound," he shouted angrily, extending his arm to the staring centurion, who speedily checked the flow of blood with a tourniquet improvised from strips torn from the fallen woman's *tunica*. Carefully concealing the bandage beneath a fold of his tunic, he whispered to Epaphroditus, who at once left the room, and in a moment four of the guards came running in from the vestibule.

"Pick her up and throw her in a litter," he said savagely, indicating the motionless figure huddled on the marble pavement, her torn and dishevelled garments stained with blood. "Take her to the *carcer* and tell the keeper—nay, I will go with thee and give my own instructions," with an evil expression. Turning to the centurion he continued:

"Set a guard at each entrance to the house, from which none may go out upon whatsoever pretext, and no one enter without the watchword and my own countersign. Let two of thy men take this whimpering slave back to the palace. And hearken!" with a threatening gesture at the sobbing Eos; "if thou dost breathe a whisper of what hath happened, the blow thou hadst from Messalina's chariot will seem like a lover's caress in comparison with what thou shalt suffer from the iron hooks!" And with a con-

temptuous glance at Octavia, staring in silent agony at the soldiers bearing the unconscious form of Pythias through the doorway, he strode from the room.

With curtains drawn close, the *lectica* was borne rapidly down the hill, a band of prætorians marching in advance and on either side, Tigellinus in his own conveyance forming the rear-guard.

In the gathering twilight the swiftly-moving procession attracted comparatively slight attention—a few loungers at the street corners and in front of the wineshops staring curiously as it passed through the *subura*. Night was at hand when they swung round the Curia and skirted the upper end of the Forum, from which the crowds had departed; and save a few belated pedestrians the Argentarius was empty when they approached the dark and forbidding *carcer*, at the foot of the Capitol.

The door was opened by a swarthy, coarse-featured man of powerful build whose naturally repulsive expression was accentuated by the loss of an eye.

“Where is Largus?” said the prefect impatiently, pushing his way into the dimly-lighted anteroom.

“He hath just gone out, but will return within the hour,” the man replied deprecatingly.

Tigellinus uttered an imprecation. He was in an ugly mood. Matters had not gone entirely to his liking. His wound pained him, and his anger burned deeply at the woman who had defied him, for whom he was planning a terrible punishment, the details of which he preferred to arrange personally with the prefect of the prison.

But it was impossible for him to remain. He had been expected long before at the palace, where Nero, and especially Poppæa, would be impatiently awaiting his report and fuming over the delay. And that cursed Epaphroditus, whom thoughtlessly he had neglected to caution, might babble. Once let it be known that he had been wounded and narrowly escaped death at the hand of an unpracticed woman, he would become the laughing-

stock of Rome. How the prætorians themselves would guffaw behind his back! And he would never hear the last of the gibes and taunts of Petronius and the other Augustians, in their jealousy of his influence over Cæsar always on the watch for an opportunity to mortify and belittle him. The story must never get out. He could rely upon the discretion of the centurion and the apprehensions of the slave-girl, while from the woman herself there would be nothing to fear after a few hours: but the lips of Epaphroditus must be sealed without a moment's loss of time.

While he was reflecting the two prætorians who were supporting the unfortunate Pythias stood apathetically near the door. Still unconscious when lifted from the litter and carried up the steps which led to the prison, under the effect of the cool night air and the change from a recumbent position, she began to revive, and moving her head restlessly uttered a low moan.

The prefect turned, and the prætorians looked at him inquiringly as they shifted their position.

"Lay her down on the floor," he said brusquely, "and wait outside," and as the door closed behind them he inquired of the jailor:

"Are there any in the lower dungeon?"

The man shook his head, observing with a ghastly leer:

"The two who laughed when Cæsar was tuning his lyre on the stage went to the river last night."

Drawing closer Tigellinus spoke rapidly, with sharp emphasis:

"Put this woman in the Tullianum, and allow none to converse with her. She hath been condemned to death for treason, having resisted and threatened with a knife during the arrest of one of Cæsar's enemies. The Emperor may require that she be interrogated, in which case I shall return. But if I neither come nor send other order before the third hour after midnight, I care not what happeneth to her, provided she is in the Tiber at break

of day: all of which thou shalt report precisely to the prefect on his return. Go now to the door and call for the prætorian Rufus, who will aid in lowering her to the dungeon"—turning to adjust the bandage on his arm.

"It is needless, noble prefect," said the guard unctuously; "Eryx, who is asleep in the chamber, will help if need be, although it were strange if I alone cannot compass it," his eye alight with evil passion as he gloated over the dishevelled beauty of the prisoner, who had relapsed into unconsciousness.

With an oath the prefect struck him a violent blow in the face, shouting furiously,

"By all the gods, what hath happened that today men and women alike defy me! Do as I command, thou foul scum, ere the other eye is torn out with the pincers and thy trampled body flung on the Gemoniæ!"

In a spasm of fear the man ran to the entrance, and a tall athletic youth of handsome, serious countenance and modest bearing speedily appeared. After rehearsing the instructions previously given to the jailor, Tigellinus concluded:

"I have selected thee, Rufus, as one I can trust to watch this brute and his comrade asleep within, who shall be under thy command, until the prefect Largus hath learned my orders. The service should not be overlong, and after reporting its fulfillment to me at the palace, or elsewhere as the Emperor's Secretary may advise upon thy inquiry, thou shalt have leave until the morrow at midday"; adding in a whisper as he passed out, "I mistrust this ugly villain and will leave Lentulus and Balbus outside where they can hear thee call in case of trouble."

When the keeper returned after securing the door the young prætorian assumed command with easy nonchalance.

"Bring some water," he said mildly; "the woman was badly shaken by a fall on the marble pavement and should be revived before removal to the Tullianum as the prefect

commanded. If through lack of attention she hath not recovered sufficiently to be questioned on his return, we shall be scored heavily."

With a sidelong glance of mingled contempt and suspicion the man left the room, returning directly with the water in a bowl of red clay.

"Awaken thy comrade," said Rufus, still carelessly leaning against the wall as the man placed the bowl on the floor: "set up a lamp in the lower dungeon, spread a blanket and place a cup near the spring. Make haste, and bring him back with thee, that one may remain at the door against the coming of Largus, while the other assisteth me in removal of the prisoner."

With a surly nod the man withdrew. Listening intently in a moment Rufus heard the sound of voices, followed by the opening of a door and the fall of retreating footsteps.

Instantly his manner changed. He ran across the room, dropped on his knees beside Pythias, and after deftly rearranging her disordered garments, alternately bathed her pallid face and vigorously chafed her temples and wrists.

Slowly the fluttering eyelids opened, and after a momentary vacant stare, with a terrified expression and a low tremulous cry she made a feeble effort to avoid his touch. Withdrawing his hands he whispered earnestly,

"Have no fear—'tis Rufus, the son of Lucilla, the friend of Paul and Octavia. Try to understand and do exactly as I bid: there is but a moment. Thou art in the *carcer*, but the prefect hath gone and there is no present danger. The keepers are preparing the dungeon: there will be a lamp there, and a blanket to rest on—and there is water flowing from the rock. Thou wilt be alone many hours, but keep thy courage: I will bear word to Marcus and his friend—and to Octavia, who is unharmed and anxious only about thee. I cannot say more—they are coming. Close thine eyes for a little, and as thou lovest life let no sign of aught between us escape thee. I will be with thee every moment until thou art safe in the dungeon. May the

Christus give thee strength and—here they come!” and with a lithe movement he regained his feet and was mechanically sprinkling her face with the last drops from the bowl when the men ran in.

“Thou hast been overlong,” he said in affected annoyance: then stooping he shook Pythias lightly by the arm and spoke incisively:

“Rouse thyself and answer me: art better now?”

As if with an effort the dark eyes partly opened and she made the faintest pretense of affirmation.

“The water hath revived her,” he said, turning to the men; “is everything in readiness?”

“’Tis all as thou directedst,” the one-eyed man answered gruffly, Eryx coinciding, with a good-natured grin.

Approaching the outer door, Rufus called briskly, “Hola! Balbus—Lentulus!” and as muffled voices were heard in quick acknowledgment, he continued:

“We are taking her to the dungeon: until I call again let none enter save the prefect Largus”; then lifting Pythias as easily as if she were a child, he followed Eryx into the passage, after tersely directing the sullen keeper to attend the door until his return.

Descending a flight of stone steps they entered the main prison—the ancient dungeon of Ancus Marcius, a damp, unlighted room some thirty feet long by twenty wide and fifteen feet high, constructed of huge blocks of tufa, without cement. In the middle of the floor a dark hole yawned, giving access to the dreaded Tullianum.

Under the prætorian’s instructions Eryx made a loop at one extremity of a rope which lay coiled near the opening and passed the free end through an iron ring in the floor. Supporting his burden with one arm and thrusting his other arm through the loop Rufus cautiously worked his way into the opening, whereupon Eryx, slowly paying out the rope through the ring, lowered him safely to the floor below.

After a hasty glance around the dungeon, which was

hewn out of the solid rock, and ventilated only by the hole in the vaulted stone ceiling, Rufus laid Pythias on the blanket. In the dim light of the smoky lamp her eyes met his bravely: she even attempted a pitiful smile of reassurance. Indicating the cup near the spring, with a finger on his lips he pressed her hand gently, and regaining the rope was hauled up by the guard.

A moment later he was back in the anteroom, and after exchanging a few words with the prætorians outside, ignoring the resentful doorkeeper he seated himself on a bench, impatiently awaiting the return of Largus.

THE FEAST OF ANNA PERENNA

AFTER devoting several hours to their friends at the camp, about the middle of the afternoon Junius and the tribune proceeded leisurely to the Forum and mingled with the vast crowd which had congregated under the lure of the glorious sunshine.

On their way down the Esquiline Marcus turned aside for a passing inquiry of the guards at Octavia's gateway; and reassured by the report that nothing unusual had occurred, finally resigned himself to unreserved enjoyment of his holiday.

Drifting about aimlessly with the shifting currents of humanity which found their occasional level where there was promise of diversion or excitement, near the Fons Juturna they came upon the tribune Decius, formerly attached to the palace guard of Claudius, and recently assigned to the same service under Nero.

"*Perpol*, 'tis hot in the sun," he complained, after greeting them effusively: "All my energy hath taken flight. Why is it that a morning's practice with the short sword, or even to scale the Tarpeian rock, would induce less fatigue than crawling hither and yon, without an objective?"

"It means thou art growing old, Decius," said Marcus jocularly; "or perchance 'tis the penalty of thy midnight frolicking at the Milvian bridge!"

"Now in truth the latter may account for it—*certe*, it had not occurred to me," said the other with a sly wink. "Even so, I am both weary and athirst. Let us find a *lectica*—to climb the hill would finish me—and over an

amphora at old Bulla's thou shalt hear a tale which will recompense thee an hundredfold for payment of the wine."

"If Corbulo should learn that Cæsar's own prætorians are given to riding in litters to a nearby wine shop, he would cease prating about the 'effeminate East'—and stop all leave for his men to visit degenerate Rome," said Junius gaily. "Muster strength, old comrade," with a resounding thwack on the shoulder, "and if thy legs fail on the hill, Marcus shall carry thee, and I stand a second bowl to compensate thine exertion!" And after further exchange of good-natured banter the friends shouldered their way through the square and took the ascent to the *subura*.

During the preceding year the gods had taken Felix Bulla, and the famous wineshop had descended to his impecunious nephew, with whom the old uncle had become reconciled before his death. The new proprietor enjoyed a wide acquaintance among the lower classes; and although something of a scapegrace and untrained in business, he was not without shrewdness. Moreover, in this particular venture he possessed valuable auxiliaries in his keen-witted wife and their charming young daughter, who with her father's lively temperament had inherited her mother's intelligence and good looks.

Accordingly, under the change in ownership the popularity of the *popina* actually had increased; and when Marcus and his companions arrived the place was thronged with a holiday crowd, industriously cultivating a proper frame of mind for celebration that evening of the ancient festival of Anna Perenna, especially dear to the common people.

Sergius greeted his distinguished guests with elaborate respect. For their greater comfort he unceremoniously banished some roisterers from the secluded alcove in the rear and served them in person with a bowl of wine "than which Cæsar himself enjoys no rarer," as he declared with a boastful flourish.

"And by Bacchus, 'twere easy to credit the knave," said

Decius with a sigh of contentment after the first copious draught; "although it is past understanding both where he obtaineth such nectar and how he hideth it from the rabble." Then raising his voice he cried lustily:

"Hola! Sergius! Send the *tesseræ*—thanks, pretty Viola," as the curtain was pushed aside and the dice presented to him by the blushing damsel who had anticipated the order. "I can enjoy the wine better," he continued, "when the one who is to pay hath been determined—even if myself am the unfortunate! Do thou throw first, Marcus."

"Thy mind is failing with thy legs," bantered the tribune, as he thrust the dice aside. "Thyself announced that I am to settle in return for the story thou wilt relate—while Junius of his own accord hath assumed the second bowl. Go on with the tale."

"Now Fortuna be praised thou hast taken me seriously," cried Decius as he spilled a libation to the goddess before draining his cup. "But thou wilt be forced to admit the tale is worth the reckoning."

"Thou hast been so long away from Rome, Junius, perchance art not aware of Cæsar's favorite pastime. After dark sets in, garbed as a slave he roams the streets with his Augustians, smashing in the doors, beating up the watchmen, upsetting the men and carrying off the women—with the greater relish when they chance upon people of distinction. All know 'tis the Emperor and thus dare not resist—in which fact certain vulgar imitators have found safety in like misdoing.

"But on the last Kalends Nero and his friends came to grief. On the way home, after cleaning out a wineshop in the Campus Martius, incautiously they attacked the litter of Julius Montanus, borne by eight lusty Cappadocians and accompanied by his freedman Probus, the ex-gladiator. Hercules! but they were castigated! The Senator himself, who is something of an athlete, took care of Cæsar, who, more than half-drunk, was a child in his

hands; both eyes were blackened, his lip cut badly and his body bruised from head to heel!

"The others fared even worse, and must have been a sorry looking crew as they slunk home, whimpering and cursing. I was on guard when Petronius and Annæus Serenus came limping to the gate with Cæsar, covered with mud, bleeding freely, his tunica torn off and one shoe gone! While patching up Serenus, who is my wife's cousin, I coaxed from him the story. *Perpol!* it was laughable: he said Cæsar bawled like a calf when he crawled out of the ditch into which the irate Julius finally kicked him! What sayst: is it worth the price of the wine? Otherwise"—and he rattled the dice in the leather cup—

"'Tis not a tithe of its value for which I am paying," cried the delighted tribune, wiping his eyes, while Junius leaned against the wall, weak from laughter. "By Bacchus, I stand ready to regale thee and all the friends thou canst muster whenever there is another such tale to unfold!"

"There will be no more," said Decius with a grin. "Cæsar had a belly-full, and never again will adventure upon such escapades unattended. But hearken!" glancing about warily: "They go again this very night—for the first time since that other. 'Tis thought the worshippers of old Anna will be easy prey as in their drunkenness they straggle home from outside the gate; while Tigellinus himself, with two or three others, of whom I am one, will be at hand in case of need. If thou and Junius wouldst enjoy some rare sport, disguise thyself and join the revellers beyond the Milvian bridge: mayhap even thyself might have a crack at Cæsar!"

"By the gods let us do it, Marcus!" cried Junius gleefully. "Ho Sergius! Another jug of thy best!"

"'Tis not for me," said Decius regretfully, rising as he tossed off the last cup. "I must be at the palace before sunset and dare not tarry longer. May the gods keep

thee: and"—with a deprecatory glance at Marcus—"if perchance 'tis I who come to Cæsar's aid, strike discreetly at thine old friend," and somewhat unsteadily he left the alcove.

Although Marcus shook his head in good-natured disapprobation of his companion's eager acquiescence in their comrade's suggestion, the latter had appealed to him forcibly. And under incentive of the wine, the unwonted relaxation and the emotions aroused by good fellowship, as Junius pictured the event in alluring colors all the tribune's fun-loving proclivities, so long repressed, clamored for indulgence.

"As thou wilt then," he said in impulsive surrender. "But let us eat here first, then go to the training quarters where Gallus can fit us out with a disguise, after which, by way of the blind lane, we can both slip out and return unnoticed."

Thus it happened that the unfortunate Pythias on her way to the *carcer* passed within a stone's throw of her unconscious friends, lingering over their wine after a hearty repast of sausages, kid, cold ham, beans and early sprouts served by the buxom wife and vivacious daughter of the pleased Sergius.

Gallus laughed knowingly when Marcus begged use of the little back room and the key to the exit.

"There will be plenty of amusement at the grove of Perenna tonight. On the shelf in the alcove thou wilt find a bronze-colored wig: if thy friend waiting in the alley (thou needst not have taken the precaution) is of the proper build, let him wear it, and as Cæsar, under thy protection may safely indulge in whatsoever mischief."

Laying aside his toga and boots, from the *lanista's* store Marcus selected a short, dark-colored *tunica*, a ragged *sagum*, or rough woolen blanket, and a pair of *sculponeæ*—the wooden clogs worn by the Roman peasant. Junius also donned a *tunica*, over which he threw a dark-colored *palla*, and thrust his feet into a pair of *crepidæ*,

resembling leather slippers—finally, amidst uproarious laughter, adjusting the red wig, while assisting Marcus to suitably darken and soil his face, arms and hands. Then, like school boys on a frolic, they stole through the blind alley and joined the procession streaming along the Flaminian Way. The moon had not yet risen when they passed the gate, but it was soaring above the eastern hills in all the splendor of its full illumination as they approached the famous bridge built by the Censor Scaurus in the days of the Republic. It was here one hundred years before that the Cataline conspirators were captured; and here also two hundred and fifty years later Maxentius, the last pagan Emperor, was drowned after his defeat by Constantine at Saxa Rubra.

The mirthful festival of Anna Perenna, a mysterious old Roman deity, was observed annually at the full moon on the Ides of March (in early Latin times the first month in the year). Anna was the ancient moon-goddess who every month resumed her youth and accordingly was regarded as the bestower of long life and all that contributed to it. Her shrine was in a grove of fruit trees near the first milestone between the Milvian bridge and the confluence of the Anio and Tiber.

Here the populace held their feast under the open sky. For while a few set up tents or constructed rude huts of boughs, over which their cloaks were spread, for the most part they lay in the open—in couples of men and women.

All sorts of revelry obtained, especially drinking; it being a feature of the occasion to pray for as many years of life as cups of wine were swallowed. There was much singing, in which, their unbound hair flowing and with immoderate gesticulation, the women participated freely. In these wild and unrestrained antics the mirth of the spectators was roused to a high pitch: and when the celebrants in a consequent state of inebriation, and always in couples, set out upon their return to the city, the scenes beggared description.

Here an old woman might be seen pulling along an old man, both sadly intoxicated. There a stalwart youth staggered by, with a girl on his shoulder, babbling incoherently. The air resounded with snatches of ribald songs, screams of laughter, imprecations and incoherent cries; while every now and then the delighted auditors were regaled with grotesque attempts at oratory and dramatic recital.

For the space of two or three hours Junius and the tribune enjoyed the spectacle; then as the crowd diminished rapidly with the departing revellers, they drifted back to the bridge to await with lively anticipation the expected appearance of Cæsar and his friends.

On the side towards the city an expanse of shrubbery extended along the road at the right, terminating near the bridge in a clump of tall ilex. As they were seeking the partial concealment its shade afforded the figure of a man, who had been furtively studying the passers-by, detached itself from the lower abutment, and in the shadow of the high sustaining wall drew as near to them as was possible without attracting attention. At first their low-pitched voices were barely audible, but listening acutely he caught the name of Marcus in some animated rejoinder by his companion. With an exclamation of relief he ran towards them, calling in guarded tones:

“ ’Tis I, Rufus—God be praised I have found thee! Only by chance did I learn thou hadst been seen at the *popina* with Decius, who advised me to look for thee here. I have been watching for hours: in truth it seemed hopeless, but the matter is urgent—come into the bushes,” parting the branches as he spoke, the others, oppressed by a nameless fear, following in nervous haste.

In a low, tense voice Rufus briefly recounted the prefect’s visit to Octavia, the posting of a heavy guard at her house, the removal of Pythias to the *carcer*, and the orders transmitted to the keeper of the prison.

Marcus swayed dizzily, staggering as if about to fall,

Junius, white-faced and trembling, staring at the young prætorian in silent terror. The former recovered first and without a word turned to leave the thicket.

"Wait yet a moment—I have not finished," urged the prætorian, but deaf to the entreaty the tribune strode on, Rufus struggling desperately to detain him as he pleaded earnestly:

"Hear me out, Marcus! I swear there is no present danger, but if thou wilt not listen the hope I bring may be lost—help me, Junius!" and together they managed to restrain him until of a sudden he relaxed and slid to the ground, sobbing and tearing at the earth with his hands in frenzied madness. Then as a burst of discordant laughter from some passing revellers broke the momentary silence, springing to his feet the tortured man shook his fist in the direction of the Via, exclaiming in low-pitched fury:

"I am accursed—accursed—to be roaming the streets like a mawkish slave, in vulgar dalliance with these drunken imbeciles—disloyal to my trust at the hour when most I was needed. Shame on us both—and curse thee for tempting me!" with a furious gesture at Varus, who stared in dumb dismay: then in quick reaction, stretching out his hand he said brokenly:

"'Twas the word of a caitiff, despicable and base—forgive me, Junius! And thou also, Rufus: I have behaved like a demented, timorous fool!"

"Thou hast excuse: the gods know my own wits have left me—and, as seemeth, my courage also," said Junius despairingly.

"It were strange otherwise," interposed Rufus ingenuously. "But let it pass: time presseth, and that which is of present import is yet to be considered.

"As I was about to tell thee, Octavia is unharmed, and the worst in store for her is banishment: while at the *carcer* Pythias is as safe with Largus as if thyself were the keeper."

"Who is he, to merit such confidence, and what moveth him so strangely?" said Junius, with eager solicitude.

"His father was a freedman of Scribonius Largus, the physician who went with Claudius to Britain and wrote a learned treatise on the art of healing. His loyalty to the Claudian family alone would prompt him to protect the friend of Octavia. But Pythias herself hath an even stronger claim: what he purposeth is in requital of some great service she rendered him when a child—of which he saith Marcus is informed."

"I know—and there is no doubt about Largus; make haste," said the tribune impatiently.

"He charged me to say 'tis for thee to take her away when the door swings open, which shall be his part. At the house of one of my mother's friends in the Trans-Tiber she will be safe until time affords to plan otherwise—unless thou hast something better to propose?" and as Marcus shook his head, he concluded with quiet emphasis:

"Then 'tis understood. Largus will open to three light knocks and the word 'Claudius.' From the prison go by way of the Jugarius to the Æmilian bridge: after reassuring Largus I will hasten to apprise Miriam of thy coming, then return to meet thee. If needs be, wait for me at the Tiber. Now let us be off."

Excepting a few belated couples lingering near the bridge, the Via seemed empty; but as they stepped cautiously from the thicket a disorderly group appeared coming from below, a short distance behind them four men walking abreast, their soldierly bearing easily discernible in the moonlight.

"'Tis Cæsar and the guards!" exclaimed Rufus, as he drew back precipitately. "I would not be seen by them—nor shouldst thou risk possible delay. Let us make off behind the shrubbery—I will meet thee as agreed," and he darted into the ilexes.

The others followed, but after a few steps Marcus

halted, and grasping Junius by the wrist declared recklessly:

“By all the Furies before I go that shameless youth shall get one more buffet if death cometh to me in the dealing! Quick! Stand in the shadow until I spring the trap, and thou shalt have thy share of the blows!”

An instant later he was in the road, intercepting a stalwart youth who was reeling past half-supported by a comely girl with long black hair flowing over her disordered vestments, who was laughing and singing intermittently.

By a quick movement of foot and arm, timed in unison, Marcus bowled the youth into the ditch, then with a shout of triumph seized the screaming girl and dragged her towards the thicket.

The other loiterers stood rooted in surprise and alarm; but an answering cry came from the little coterie below, now close at hand, all of whom ran after the tribune, the one in advance clad in white, short, stout, and with red hair, bawling lustily,

“Let the girl go, thou varlet! she belongeth to Cæsar!”

With a startled air Marcus swung round, and after noting carefully that the four prætorians, a hundred paces down the road, had halted, in watchful observance of the imperial escapade, loosened his hold upon the girl in such a way that under an artful push she sprawled upon the ground at the moment Cæsar approached.

Cursing thickly, after an impotent blow at the deprecatory figure which drooped before him in pretended humility and fear, Nero bent over the girl with a drunken leer. Instantly Marcus caught him by the hair, jerked his head upward and with the other hand struck him a cutting blow on the mouth—then flung him violently to the ground, where he writhed, gurgling and groaning.

In the act of recovery the tribune received a stinging blow on the ear, and the next instant found himself the

center of a furious onslaught by the clamorous Augustians. One by one he recognized them, under the rapidly shifting attitudes of the *mêlée*: Crescens, a vile wretch who had been a slave; Vatinius, crooked and deformed, formerly a shoemaker; Serenus, who had been Nero's stool-pigeon in the affair with Acte; Pythagoras and Sporus, the effeminate; the sybarite Petronius, and Claudius Senecio, the contemptible freedman. With a cry of fear the latter turned to fly as Marcus rushed at him; thrusting out a foot Junius tripped him, and falling headlong he struck a stone and lay still.

Striking right and left with savage zest, the two powerful young men made short work of the tipsy crew, who with faces bruised and bleeding went down before them with cries of pain.

"Fly! the guards are coming!" Junius panted, as Marcus bent over the sobbing girl. Lifting the terrified creature to her feet the tribune whispered:

"Thou are not hurt—nor is thy friend: run back to the road and get him away quickly"; and with the lust of battle still raging, grudgingly retreated to the thicket.

As they turned for a parting look Marcus recognized Tigellinus among those who were bending over the prostrate figure of Nero. A species of madness took possession of him. Sinking his fingers into the other's arm, he breathed in a voice choking with passion:

"By the gods of the underworld, 'tis the brute himself, Junius! For our own selfish amusement have we thrashed these puny roisterers: now let us strike a real blow for those we love!" and side by side they burst from the thicket and dashed upon the unprepared guards.

Only one of the prætorians had drawn his sword. As he lifted his arm to strike, Marcus delivered a terrific kick, and under the impact of the heavy wooden clog upon his knee-cap the man fell with a groan. Tearing the weapon from his hand Junius engaged hotly with

another guard, while Marcus hurled himself at the prefect—the fourth man, with drawn sword, momentarily standing as if in doubt which of his comrades most needed assistance.

Tigellinus had risen and was reaching for his weapon as the tribune's left hand closed tenaciously on his forearm, just where the knife had pierced it. The prefect winced with pain, his sword dropping to the ground as with a sharp wrench, which disrupted the wound, Marcus swung him about. Under every ounce of his driving power the tribune struck the hated face with his right fist—directed like the blow aimed by the giant Gaul at the freedman in Messalina's garden. Tigellinus fell an inert mass, at the moment Junius glided under his opponent's guard and ran him through the breast.

With a hoarse cry of triumph Marcus seized the prefect's sword and, thrusting his friend aside, engaged the last enemy.

After a moment of swift interplay the prætorian fell back, and as Marcus pressed him closely the other panted:

"Remember what I told thee—have a care with thy sword—and get thee hence quickly before the others arrive," and he uttered a loud cry for help.

"Thou hast lied, Decius," the tribune mumbled, still plying his sword: "thou didst assert there would be no more tales to tell—yet look about thee and admit that if a single amphora were fair measure of compensation for that other, this one would call for a cellar-full!"

Then uttering a sharp imprecation Marcus dropped his sword, and with arm hanging limply, as if wounded, disappeared with Junius in the thicket.

Keeping behind the shrubbery as far as it extended, and then following a stretch of ruins which partially screened them from observation, the fleeing men finally climbed a wall and dropped into a lane running at right angles with the Via which it crossed not far from the city gate.

"Art wounded?" inquired Junius, peering anxiously at

Marcus, who had thrown himself on the ground and was breathing heavily.

"Not a scratch," the other asserted, stretching his huge limbs complacently: "And thou?"

"He grazed my side"—exhibiting a rent in his tunica: "'twas that braggart Valerianus, who was boasting of the fatal stroke he had acquired—and thus kindly forewarned me to avoid it," with a contented laugh.

"*Certe*, the gods have been gracious," said Marcus rising. "Take my blanket in exchange for thy *palla*, and this I will throw into the cloaca," snatching the red wig from the other's head. "Go thou in advance—it were prudent not to be seen together. And here is the key to the *lanista's* door; we may not risk appearing at the *carcer* in these togs."

Cautiously gliding into the Via, they passed unnoticed through the gate, and threading their way through the crowd which still lingered there, sauntered along the moon-lit road, Marcus far enough in the rear barely to keep Junius in sight. By the first turn to the right they gained a maze of tortuous and unfrequented streets and narrow lanes, through which they hastened rapidly, shortly after midnight arriving at the door in the blind alley: and after changing their clothing, stole out again and within the time appointed were knocking at the *carcer*.

"I have not been in the Tullianum, but spoke briefly with her from above," said Largus in answer to their anxious inquiry. "She is tranquil and prepared, and thou wouldst best lose no time. Eryx is on guard at the opening: wait but a moment while I send him away—he hath been faithful and I would spare him from complicity," and he motioned them into the obscurity of an alcove, from which he withdrew a pouch of gold and then went softly down the passage.

A few moments later they heard the sound of passing footsteps, followed by the opening and closing of the outer door; and directly Largus returned, bearing some coarse,

dark-colored garments and a lantern of transparent horn, which he handed to Junius, whispering earnestly:

"Wrap her in this cloak, and be sure to draw the *pilleolus* well down over her hair. Thou knowest the way, Marcus: get her out as quickly and quietly as may be, whilst I watch the chamber where Scopas is lying."

Silently they ran through the passage and down the steps to the dungeon where, spurning the rope, Junius dropped lightly through the opening to the floor of the Tullianum; and with a flood of tears Pythias threw herself into his arms.

"Be quick," warned Marcus, lowering the rope. One after the other he hauled them up through the hole; and when Pythias had donned the cloak and cap they ran out of the dungeon and climbed the steps.

Halfway through the passage they were startled by a cry from the adjoining chamber, and halting precipitately, were further alarmed by sounds of a struggle, ending in a fall and a muffled groan. As they stood in doubt the keeper glided through a doorway further on and with a gesture of reassurance led the way to the anteroom.

Bending over the agitated Pythias, Largus took her hand and gazed searchingly into the dark eyes, misty with gathering tears.

"'Twas long ago, and thou hast forgotten me—but always have I remembered the winsome child of Fabius. Go—and may the Great Mother protect thee," he said with deep feeling.

Her tears flowing freely, Pythias pressed his hand to her breast; then, after trying in vain to speak, kissed it gratefully as Largus opened the door, and after glancing up and down the empty street, motioned them away.

"What was it?" Marcus whispered, as the others hurried down the steps.

"The wretch had been watching: I knew he suspected.

He hath gone to meet Charon," the keeper answered grimly.

"And thou—how shalt acquit thyself?" said the tribune with grave interest.

"Have no fear: before the sun rises I shall be far from the prefect's wrath," he replied impassively.

Marcus started imperceptibly: with a burning glance he seized the other's hand and wrung it with silent fervor—then hastened after the others in the direction of the Forum.

Save an occasional watchman, the great square was tenantless as they cautiously skirted its upper end, clinging to the shadows of the temples and other structures as far as the Vicus Jugarius; then hurrying on more confidently, after passing through the Boarium, they arrived in safety at the ancient bridge.

Accompanied by a comely and sympathetic Hebrew woman, Rufus was waiting for them on the other side of the river. Worn out by his labors and now that Pythias' safety was assured his anxieties about Octavia again dominant, Marcus readily yielded to the young prætorian's offer to relieve him of his charge.

"But do thou go, Junius, and after seeing her in safety, stay with Rufus during the night whilst I return to the *lanista's*; 'twere wise for each to have a witness that we slept not together," with the ghost of a smile. "Come to the training quarters in the morning—if I am elsewhere Gallus will direct thee. Farewell, little lady: may Pomponia's god comfort and preserve thee!"

In the dark chamber of the *carcer* two bodies lay on the floor. His face frightfully distorted, with gaping wounds in his side and throat, the outstretched hand of the one-eyed Phrygian still grasped the knife with which he had severed the great artery in the arm of the keeper, lying dead near the threshold.

To the experienced eyes of Tigellinus and his men, when

wonderingly they entered the unguarded prison just before the third watch, the story of what had occurred was manifest. Weakened from loss of blood, and exhausted by the death struggle with his subordinate in their quarrel for possession of the prisoner, without strength to open the door to which he had dragged himself, Largus had slowly bled to death.

But in the peaceful and serene expression of the keeper's face a reader of the Infinite might have doubted even so obvious a conclusion. And the gods themselves knew—as the tribune Marcus did not doubt—that in requital of a childish benefaction, the remembrance of which he had hugged to his breast through all the years, Largus had dealt himself the fatal blow, the more effectively to cloud the prisoner's escape—and to make certain that the pangs of the torture chamber never should wring the secret from his recreant lips.

THE GODS HELP THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

MARCUS slept badly. For the most part he passed the hours tossing restlessly, or staring into the darkness in feverish retrospection of the night's events: while during the occasional periods of mental and physical lethargy which exhausted nature induced, weird and menacing phantasms assailed his tortured vision.

Astir with the first indications of approaching dawn, he waited to hear the voice of Gallus in his apartment at the end of the passage, before leaving the little *cubiculum*. And it was not until after departure of the attendant with whom the *lanista* had been in eager and laughing converse, that he quietly entered his friend's room, exclaiming with a yawn:

"Jupiter, thy bed is of the best—rarely have I slept so long and soundly!" and before the astounded Gallus could speak, in lowered tones and with an expressive gesture the tribune admonished:

"Remember thou knowest I spent the night here!"

"It could not be otherwise," the *lanista* rejoined promptly, with a knowing grin and twinkling eyes, "since shortly after sundown I saw thee enter, and although I sat here over an amphora until the second watch, until now have not seen thee again. 'Tis plain thy condition did not belie my conclusion that the drink had been too much for thee. And *certe* thou hast paid dearly for over-dalliance with the wine cup, but for which near the grove of Anna thou also mightst have enjoyed the rare diversion which offered last night"; and with bursts of laughter he regaled

the tribune with a highly embellished account of the affair at the Milvian Bridge.

"Thou dost relate it with the precision of an eyewitness, although thou spent the hours here with the wine——"

"As thou didst sleep in the *cubiculum*!" interrupted Gallus with a chuckle. "But in truth 'twas Scirtus, the boxer, who brought the tale: he it was who was upset in the ditch by the countryman. What he did not see himself his sweetheart told him."

"Were any hurt in the fracas?" Marcus inquired carelessly.

"Senecio, whose head struck a stone, lay an hour before they revived him, and Tigellinus nearly as long, from the blow under his ear and a cut in the arm which bled freely. Valerianus was thought to be dead from a sword-thrust and another of the prefect's men had a broken knee-cap—while the marauders themselves were killed."

Marcus started violently: "Thou saidst they escaped into the bushes!"

"'Tis true," replied Gallus, "but later the prefect's reserves scouting cautiously surprised them near the river bank, where foolishly they had tarried to dress their wounds, and they were cut to pieces. The bodies were brought back to the road, where Decius and Lycoris, the pretty friend of my boxer, identified the leader, while the man with the broken knee recognized the other. 'Tis said they are country people and that the big fellow's wife, who was a sister to the other, had been carried off by the Augustians a month ago, since which nightly they have haunted the neighborhood for revenge. But come—the food awaits," and they joined the noisy family of gladiators and athletes in the triclinium, where Marcus once more heard the story of his prowess; listening bashfully to the high encomiums of the fighters, while sharing freely in their laments at the untimely death of the courageous and hard-hitting unknown.

Assured of his own immunity from suspicion by this vicarious sacrifice of the two unfortunate rustics, the tribune impulsively formed the bold project of presenting himself to Tigellinus as the most direct and promising means of obtaining information essential for any effective aid to Octavia and Pythias. Leaving word for Junius to await his return, he went directly to the house of Octavia, and being denied admission, proceeded to the camp and inquired for the prefect.

"Methinks thou art late: last night shouldst have reported thy remissness. I entrusted the Lady Octavia to thy care and thou didst surrender her without a blow," Tigellinus railed coarsely. Then noting with malicious pleasure the dull red which burned in the tribune's face, he continued:

"But Valerianus had told me of thy holiday, which in truth fell most timely; and Decius reported that when he left the wine shop thou and thy friend were qualifying for the next *Ludi Sæculares*—thirty-one years from now, if the reckoning of the first Cæsar obtains—by drinking the requisite number of cups! Where didst spend the night?"

"I slept with Gallus, the *lanista*," said Marcus, with a pretense of chagrin, "and am bound to admit he declares I proved uncompanionable, when I came to him in the first watch."

"And Varus?" the prefect laughingly inquired.

"He expected to join the prætorian Rufus, if the latter succeeded in getting off for the night: I have not seen him since we parted."

Covertly studying the dark face of the prefect as momentarily the latter stared at the floor, Marcus noted with secret pleasure a deep discoloration at the point of the left jaw, where the skin also was excoriated.

As the other looked up suddenly their eyes crossed and the prefect said, with an angry flush:

"It happened at the Milvian bridge: doubtless thou hast heard?"

"They were talking of it at breakfast; one of the *lanista's* boxers was among the spectators," the tribune answered discreetly.

"The brute wore a *cæstus* and caught me unawares—his body is in the Tiber," said the prefect scowling: then abruptly changing the subject:

"Thy service is at an end. Octavia hath been adjudged guilty of adultery and banished to Campania. She may take only three of her women as attendants."

"Is the lady Pythias to go with her?" the tribune inquired.

The prefect drew aside the folds of his *sagum* and disclosed the bandaged arm.

"She struck me with a knife, and perforce I sent her to the *carcer*, intending, after affrighting her, to set her free. But when I returned she had accomplished the impossible and escaped. Largus and the one-eyed Phrygian had slain each other. Perchance the other guard, a Sicilian whose father was one of her aunt's freedmen, may have assisted her. But nothing is known, and thou wilt say to Varus that it shall be forgotten. In truth, excepting Octavia and thyself, with one or two others whose mouths are sealed, none knows of her imprudence—for which I admit" (caressing the bandaged arm with a retrospective smile) "she had provocation.

"Junius hath resigned from the army and is rich: let him marry her and take her away for the present. As for thyself, come back to the prætorians, where a tribuneship awaits, and in time the prefecture shall be thine"—concluding with curt emphasis as Marcus shook his head:

"I will not accept thy refusal: reflect, and give me thine answer on the next Kalends."

Repressing his aversion by a powerful effort, Marcus replied:

"Let it be so understood: but grant me then a favor."

"Name it," said the prefect impatiently.

"Thou dost assure me banishment alone is the punishment to which the Emperor's daughter hath been adjudged?"

"'Tis the truth," he answered with apparent candor. "Moreover in the *decretum* Cæsar enjoins she shall be treated with consideration, and the villa of the Dictator on the cliff at Baiæ hath been assigned to her. She sets out at daybreak tomorrow—under guard, 'tis true, but, as thou knowest, in that respect different from the past only in that now she herself will be aware of it!"

"Then what I crave," said Marcus ingenuously, "is leave to say farewell to the one I have so long served, and cheer her with word of thy forbearance towards Pythias, of whose safety also I would assure her."

Roused by the tone in which the last words were uttered, with a burning glance Tigellinus cried abruptly:

"By the gods, I am minded to believe 'twas thou who upset things at the *carcer*!"

"It might have been so had I known—instead of lying drunk at the *lanista's*," jeered Marcus recklessly.

"*Certe*, thou wouldst have enjoyed it more, although for thy present comfort 'tis as well thou hast an alibi," rejoined the prefect, drily.

Then, impressed by the tribune's fearless spirit and more than ever determined to win him, Tigellinus acted with characteristic promptitude. Scratching upon a tablet and impressing his ring upon the wax, he said in a friendly tone:

"'Tis a permit to visit the *domus* at will until thy mistress departs on the morrow, and thereafter still to make thy home there until this other matter between us shall be decided"; and checking the other's acknowledgments with an affable gesture, dismissed him.

"There goes one who was enquiring for thee," said a prætorian, as Marcus hurried through the gate: "I did not know thou wert here—*hola!*" and the retreating figure

turned and stood expectantly, until in apparent recognition of the approaching tribune, he said with quiet assurance:

“I have a message for thee.”

“Who art thou?” replied Marcus, studying him intently.

“The mother of Rufus, the prætorian, of whose household I am a freedman, hath sent me. I saw thee once at the palace when my mistress came to the lady Octavia with Phebe, who brought the letter from Paul to the believers in Rome. Lucilla bade me say that the priest of Christus set out from Puteoli yester morning and may be expected on the fourth day.”

“I remember—thou art Hermas,” said Marcus, with a friendly nod. “Thy news is most timely and cometh like a gift from the gods!”

“There is but one God—and the Christus is his son and oracle,” rejoined Hermas gravely.

“As to that I know not,” said the tribune; “but if it be so indeed, then doubtless ’tis Lucilla’s god who hath brought it to pass. Give thanks to thy gracious mistress and say that even now I am on my way to the Lady Octavia, who will find great comfort in the knowledge of Paul’s coming”: and highly elated he hastened down the street.

Octavia had passed the night in hopeless misery, and as the morning hours dragged, with nothing to break the tension, her sufferings became acute. She was not allowed to converse with her servants, and although the guards treated her with quiet respect, they stolidly refused to answer questions.

The shock to her sensitive spirit in the shameful charge of Tigellinus was forgotten in the poignant terrors of the tragedy which had overtaken Pythias. She apprehended that death would be the inevitable result of the attempt upon the prefect’s life. The bitterness of that thought alone was unendurable; but the dreadful phantoms of

the torture chamber and the other traditional horrors of the terrible *carcer* racked her soul with indescribable anguish.

In the depth of her misery and despair she heard the eager voice of Marcus in the anteroom asking leave to enter—then he was at her side, whispering:

“She is unharmed—and safe with friends of Lucilla in the Trans-Tiber!”

With a low cry Octavia struggled to her feet, clinging to the high-backed *cathedra* with one hand, the other pressed against her heaving bosom, while speaking low and rapidly he told her of the events of the night and of his interview with Tigellinus, passing lightly over the affair at the Milvian bridge and laying stress upon the promised immunity for Pythias.

“’Tis the Christus hath done it!” Octavia cried in low-voiced rapture. “All through the night I called upon His name, and as promised in the *epistola*, He hath saved her! And now that I know she hath escaped and will go free, for myself I care not what is in store—even though it be to live and die in dreadful Pandataria. But oh! Marcus”—her voice vibrant with passionate longing—“if only before it all ends I might once see and talk with Paul—for which I have so long yearned and prayed!”

“And ’tis that also of which I bring thee hope,” he answered jubilantly. “Lucilla hath just sent word by her freedman that even now the priest is coming up from Puteoli over the great South Road, by which thou wilt travel to Campania. Tomorrow, doubtless, they will reach Appii Forum, or perchance Tres Tabernæ, where easily Julius, the centurion in charge, may be induced to stop for the night—which for thee likewise may be so arranged: already I have a plan to compass it.”

Trembling with emotion, for an instant Octavia stared in breathless surprise at the smiling tribune: then holding out both hands she said brokenly:

“I will not cheapen thy thoughtfulness and rare devo-

tion with thanks, but I will pray the Christus to reward thee!"

"If thou wouldst pray for what I most covet, entreat thy god only that I may be permitted to serve thee always," said Marcus naïvely. "But now I must be gone: there is much to do and I need the counsel of Junius, who will be fretting out his heart at the *lanista's*. Expect me again before the tenth hour."

Halfway down the hill on his way to the training quarters, under a sudden impulse Marcus stopped abruptly and reflected. Since his mind was made up, and nothing his friend might urge would dissuade him, it would only be a loss of valuable time—which indeed might result in his missing Tigellinus, at thought of which he turned and hurried back to the camp.

"The gods are still directing me," he said to himself when informed that the prefect was on the point of setting out for the palace; and with rising self-assurance, followed the attendant into the inner room.

"Perchance thy mistress refused to receive thee, and thou hast returned to accept my offer without further delay," said the prefect jestingly, surprised at the other's unexpected appearance.

"In the first thou art wrong—as to the other I have come to bargain," said Marcus boldly.

"The Lady Octavia bows to the will of Cæsar, although she bitterly resents the shameful charge of a perjured and malicious slave, which all Rome will consider false—nay, hear me out!" as the prefect angrily interrupted. "In truth she turns her back gladly on Rome, except for two regrets from which accordingly I would have thee relieve her.

"One is continued anxiety about her friend, lasting separation from whom would rankle sore. Thyself hath suggested that Junius shall marry Pythias and take her away. He hath a villa at Cumæ. Authorize me to say that her pardon is conditioned upon the marriage and that

thereafter she may be free to wait upon the Lady Octavia at will"; adding shrewdly, "It would change resentment to gratitude on the part of Varus, who stands well with the army and, as thou knowest, is a favorite of Corbulo.

"The other matter is in itself trifling, although so important to her. There is a priest of the new Hebrew cult on his way up from Puteoli, who under a charge of sedition in Judæa appealed to Cæsar and was sent to Rome in the custody of Julius, a centurion of the Augustan cohort. Through letters from the wife of Aulus Plautius, who as a guest of Festus attended the trial in Cæsarea, Octavia hath become strangely interested in this Paul, as the priest is named, and craves an opportunity to meet him. Tomorrow, coming and going, on the Appia they should meet somewhere between Aricia and Tarracina—with a little planning say at Appii Forum, where the interview might occur.

"Grant but these two favors in her behalf: then following the nuptials of Varus and shortly after the Kalends, I stand ready to report here for such assignment as thou shalt determine."

"On thine honor, Marcus, there is nothing beneath the surface of thy proposal?" said Tigellinus with a searching glance.

The tribune flushed, but answered steadily:

"I confess the hope that at least sometimes I may be detailed in command of Octavia's guard."

"I have won him," reflected the prefect exultantly. "He is too simple-minded to devise a plot and too transparent to conceal it if induced to participate in one. 'Tis little to grant for what I get, and the latter I will put to still greater advantage by making use of it to safeguard against a possible outbreak when Octavia is sent away"; and striding to the door he directed the orderly to summon the centurion Rufus.

"In a moment shalt take him to the cohort, Rufus," said the prefect, after the young officer appeared and ex-

changed cordial greetings with the tribune, "and gladden thy comrades with the word that after the Kalends he will be their tribune in place of the braggart Valerianus, who last night met his death in a brawl at the Milvian bridge. But first dispatch a courier to intercept the centurion Julius, who is coming up from Puteoli with a Hebrew priest—a prisoner from Cæsarea. Direct him to stop at Appii Forum until thy arrival there tomorrow with the Lady Octavia, who shall be allowed to interview the priest. Marcus will go with thee to Baiæ, but only as a fellow traveler, and without duty or authority either in respect of Octavia, thyself or thy escort. Art satisfied, Marcus? Then go, and report to me on thy return!"

The cohort received the news with noisy acclamations and it was with difficulty that Rufus and the tribune broke away from the boisterous crowd—the former bound for Octavia's home to prepare for the morrow's journey, Marcus to keep his belated appointment with Junius. The latter was overjoyed by the tribune's story and, procuring a litter, the two friends hastened to the secluded house beyond the Tiber, from whence, as had been suggested by Rufus, Pythias was conveyed to the home of Lucilla, where once more Marcus related the events of the day.

"And since now for Pythias 'tis a choice between the Flamens and the *carcer*, at last methinks thou wilt marry me!" said Junius gaily, with a sly wink at the tribune, who rejoined humorously:

"And since permission to visit Octavia at Baiæ is accorded the little lady only as the wife of Corbulo's tribune, doubtless we may expect an early marriage. I shall return within a few days and claim my privilege to seal the nuptial tablets!"

"And 'tis precisely as both have surmised and for no other reasons that I consent," said Pythias, with a flash of the old spirit: "otherwise indeed, so far as I am concerned 'Corbulo's tribune' might again betake himself to

the East and find solace with his beautiful Parthian princess!" Then in a flood of happy emotion she threw herself into the arms of the smiling and sympathetic matron, who led her from the room.

OCTAVIA MEETS THE APOSTLE

A FAINT glow in the east heralded the awakening of dawn, as Octavia and her maids quietly entered the curtained litters drawn up in the shadowy vestibule, and escorted only by Rufus and Marcus proceeded down the hill. Although few would be abroad at so early an hour, the chance of attracting attention had been further lessened by dispatching the baggage with the prætorian guard the day before. This arrangement also served to break the long foot-journey of the soldiers, who would go as far as Aricia, near the fifteenth milestone, on the first day, and on that following cover the additional twenty-five miles to Forum Appii. After spending the night there, all were to travel by boat to Tarricina, where carriages for Octavia and her little *familia* and horses for the prætorians would be in waiting to convey them to Sinuessa on the Campanian border, and on the next day they would reach Baiæ.

Octavia had listened with calm indifference to these details as related by Rufus. Aware that the journey would be a trying one, to the observant eyes of the two officers she embarked upon it nevertheless not only with complacency but with an apparent eagerness which bordered on exultation.

In what had occurred she apprehended a deeper significance than the bare fact of her exile from Rome. The malignant purpose of her enemies was manifest in the outrageous charge used as a pretext for her banishment. She was too intelligent, too familiar with the history of her house, not to visualize in her present situation a tragedy

like that in which her mother, her father, her brother and the Augusta in turn had met a violent death. Nor could she have failed to recall that scarcely a stone's throw from her starting point that day, under strangely similar circumstances her youthful lover set out to meet his own shameful end in Campania.

But the force of all these blows long since had spent itself, and the dreadful visions of the past no longer tormented or affrighted her. Since out of the wreck of her misfortunes the safety and happiness of Pythias mercifully had been vouchsafed, for herself every desire, every longing, every hope, every emotion of her soul now centered in that hoped-for wondrous interview with the inspired Teacher—which was to resolve her last doubts and bestow that “perfect peace” Pomponia had attained; which would make the past, with all its sin, with all its shame and sorrow, seem like a long-forgotten dream!

In the crisp, sharp air of the March dawn steadily the little *cortège* made its way along the dusky streets of the slumbering city. Skirting the upper end of the Market Place, as they passed under Caligula's bridge Octavia looked up with a reminiscent smile at the roof of the Temple of Saturn, from which Pythias had thrown her first love-token to Junius, and she herself had waved her childish hand to her betrothed climbing to the Capitol in her father's Triumph!

As they swung around the Great Circus, pensively she recalled that memorable day when Britannicus and Nero rode in the Trojan Game—and Pythias lost and paid her bet. She winced a little in passing the junction with the Via Ostiensis, burned into her memory as the spot where, in the dreadful heat of that dreadful day, impulsively she had turned back to the Palatine in abject surrender to the *patria potestas* which condemned her to a living death with Nero. But even the torture of that thought was softened by the remembrance of those many happy journeys to Pomponia's villa—every step of which was a

struggle against the affectionate acclaim of the kindly populace. And she smiled pathetically at recollection of the child who in default of other gift, had thrown his kitten into the *sella*.

Outside the Porta Capena Octavia and the maids changed to a *carruca*, drawn by mules, Marcus and the centurion mounting horses, and the real journey began.

The first quivering shafts from the sun pierced the tree-tops as they approached the lane to Pomponia's villa and, as if in irritable protest, from its lofty perch in the elm beneath which Messalina had rested on the morning before her death, a crow cawed hoarsely. The superstitious heart of the pagan Marcus contracted painfully at the evil omen. But to Octavia portents had lost their dread; and in her expression of pensive gravity, as she leaned out to gaze earnestly in the direction of the villa, the anxious tribune discerned neither fear nor undue sorrow—only a gentle melancholy at the breaking of this last material link in the hallowed associations of the past.

Traveling slowly they passed the shabby little hamlet of Bovillæ, at the tenth milestone, and two hours later approached Aricia, lying at the foot of the Alban Mount, which was crowned by the venerable temple of Jupiter Latialis, erected by Tarquin the Superb as the meeting place of the forty-seven cities of the Latin confederation. Nearby, on the borders of the Lake Nemoensis was the shrine of Diana Aricina, who was worshipped with barbarous rites, her priest always a runaway slave, who became the reigning king of the order by killing his predecessor in single combat.

The proximity of these famous temples made the ancient Latium town a place of consequence—and as such the only one in the hundred miles between Rome and Sinuessa where anything but the meanest entertainment was available for travelers on the Queen of Roads. Here they stopped for *prandium* and a brief rest, resuming their journey shortly after midday.

Just beyond Three Taverns they overtook and passed the prætorians. and the afternoon was drawing to a close when Appii Forum appeared in the near distance.

Founded by Octavia's great ancestor when he built the Via which bears his name, the primitive settlement in the Pontine marshes eventually acquired some importance as a market place and rendezvous for sailors employed on the canal which in the time of Augustus had been constructed alongside the highway to a point at the lower end of the marsh, near the sacred grove of Feronia, the Sabine goddess of Freedom.

Not far from the hamlet they overtook a band of travelers who, until shortly before their approach, had been resting by the roadside. Some were riding donkeys, and there were a few *cisia*, open, two-wheeled carts, resembling gigs, in each of which from four to six persons were crowded; but the greater number, including both men and women, were walking. Although manifestly weary and footsore, all seemed cheerful and happy and, as they made room for the *carruca*, some of the women began singing.

Strangely moved by a familiar note in the strain, in passing Octavia leaned forward to scan the upturned faces. All of the singers were strangers to her, but among a little group in the background she recognized Hermas, the freedman of Lucilla, and two of the latter's friends, who were talking earnestly with a Greek woman she had seen at one of the night assemblages outside the Porta Nomentana. Instantly the thought flashed through her mind that the wayfarers were Christians, who had come from Rome to meet Paul!

In her momentary bewilderment, and under the emotions aroused by so unexpected an event, Octavia was oblivious of the eager interest displayed by the travelers as her identity was bruited about. Perhaps not until that moment had she accepted as a certainty the fact of Paul's coming. And under the compelling power of this expres-

sion of faith on the part of these devoted believers in Christ who so cheerfully endured the privations and hardships of their long and arduous journey to manifest their love for the prisoner, to cheer him with their welcome and sustain him with their company, subconsciously she drew nearer to that final act of confession which should attest her own devotion and faith.

Alighting in front of the low and squalid *caupona* where the night was to be spent, with scant ceremony Marcus and the centurion opened a passage through the crowd of rough-looking idlers who had assembled; and after a few words with the nonchalant landlord, impassively leaning against the doorpost, Rufus whispered regretfully to Octavia:

“The tavern is crowded, and the accommodations are scanty; so that perforce thy women must sleep in the loft. But in one of the better rooms is a Roman lady who will share her bed with thee”; and preceded by a fat and slovenly chambermaid, who had been summoned by the *caupo*, they traversed a narrow, dirty and foul-smelling passage to a curtained doorway at its lower end.

As Octavia entered doubtfully, a young woman plainly clad, and wearing a *pilleus* which shadowed the upper part of her face, rose from a wooden bench below the diminutive window-opening and advancing timidly said in a trembling voice:

“My mistress is out; but let me take thy *palla*, lady, and unloose thy sandals, and while thou art resting on the couch I will go for some water—unless thou wouldst prefer thine own maid?”

Greatly agitated, with parted lips and eyes dilating, Octavia leaned over to peer into the downcast face, its features barely discernible in the dim light of the chamber: the woman had gone and the two officers stood motionless in the doorway. Suddenly, with an inarticulate cry, the girl tore the cap from her head, letting loose a mass of

dark hair and, as the other breathed her name, Pythias—for she it was—threw her arms about her friend in an outburst of tearful laughter.

Pressing her close Octavia murmured fervently, “Every hour there cometh some new and unhopèd-for blessing; and for this one, so great, I thank the dear Lord Christus!”

“’Twas not the Christus but Marcus who devised it,” declared the unbelieving little pagan stoutly, as she glanced towards the doorway; but the young men had quietly withdrawn. “There! I nearly betrayed him. Rufus is supposed not to know—although in truth he must have surmised that I am playing the part of maid to his mother.”

“Is Lucilla here too?” exclaimed Octavia joyfully.

“’Tis with her I came—disguised as thou seest”—said Pythias gaily, extending her arms, which, as also her face and neck, had been stained with brownish pigment. “Junius did not favor it until Marcus skillfully won him by proposing he should drive us; garbed as a Sicilian muleteer thou wouldst never know him!” with a contented little laugh.

“We left Rome yesterday, spent the night at Aricia, and arrived at midday: and here have I been waiting since the ninth hour, adjuring all the gods of Greece and Rome to haste thy coming—until I thought I should go mad with impatience!”

“How could the hours drag with Junius to bear thee company?” Octavia chided playfully: “or perchance he spends his time at the stables, caring for his horses?”

“There or elsewhere—now and again dutifully coming to inquire whether there are any orders,” said Pythias demurely. “’Twas he who forewarned me of thine arrival; then, to test the efficacy of his disguise, took a position in the front line of onlookers as thou didst pass through the vestibule!”

“And Lucilla?”

“With two of her friends she went up the Via to join those foolish people who have toiled all the way from Rome to greet the Hebrew Preacher: we overtook them this morning near the Three Taverns. She promised to avert her face whilst thou wert passing: I wanted it all to be a surprise. And oh! *cara*, Lucilla saith the evil days have gone and now thou wilt find joy and peace to requite for all the bitter past. If I could be sure 'tis true, my own happiness would be without a cloud!”

“Then may it be so for thee! Already I have found my happiness in thine—thou art not counting the days until the Kalends more eagerly than I—while through Paul I shall find the everlasting peace at the feet of the Lord Christus. And if on her way home from the East Pomponia may be persuaded to turn aside and visit thee at quiet Cumæ, thou also mayst come to believe in the one God of love and mercy!”

“No,” said Pythias, shaking her head resolutely. “Lucilla saith none may win the favor of the god who would not willingly give up anything, if he exact it as a sacrifice.

“When I asked if she believed Pomponia would abandon Aulus Plautius—or she herself give up her beloved son if the god demanded, she said ‘Yes’—although in truth it sounded hollow to me! And I know I could not do it—I would rather have Junius than any new god. And I would give up most, if not all, of the old ones rather than lose him now,” she added naïvely.

“Wouldst not give him up for me?” said Octavia smiling.

“To save thee pain, or add to thy happiness—Yes! a thousand times, as thou knowest well,” she answered passionately: “but merely as a needless sacrifice, to prove my love for thee, I just couldn’t now—if only for Junius’ sake: I have made him wait so long!” she said archly. “There! I have hurt thee! But 'tis true: I never knew

how much I loved him until he came to me in that frightful dungeon.”

Again in fancy Octavia lived over that hour at Pomponia's villa, when in the sunset glow she herself learned for the first time how deeply she loved. At that period of her life would she have given up her beloved if exacted as proof of her submission to the new god? How many indeed would willingly forego their present joys and earthly desires in exchange for a vague and undefined promise of eternal happiness? Was that promise, then, reserved, mainly for those who like herself had been scourged by suffering and bereft of all hope of earthly happiness—for whom renunciation would be easy because they had nothing left to renounce? That would seem the inevitable conclusion if Lucilla was right—and she had the acquaintance of Paul, the inspired priest, from whom in his missive to the Romans she had received a special greeting as one of “the chosen in the Lord.” But if acceptance of the Christus carried no assurance of purely human joy, which for each individual must depend alone upon the degree of sacrifice enjoined by the god, how was the new religion any better than the old, under which all were subject to the caprices of the Fates? And in the tumult and confusion of her thoughts, unconscious of her anxiously observant companion, with bowed head and averted face Octavia sighed heavily.

“I am a selfish little beast to disquiet thee or even speak of myself when thou art in need of rest and food,” cried Pythias reproachfully. With gentle insistence she persuaded Octavia to recline on the couch, and after making her as comfortable as possible was hastening for assistance when, to her great relief, Lucilla appeared, accompanied by the maids.

Scarcely had Octavia exchanged greetings with the sweet-faced, gray-haired Roman matron when from the direction of the canal there arose a confused murmur, steadily rising and increasing in volume as the voices of

the throng approaching from below blended with and were lost in the eager shouts and acclaim of those gathered in front of the tavern and along the road to the south.

"'Tis the Apostle!" said Lucilla in quiet elation pressing Octavia's hand. "My son hath talked with the centurion Julius, who is most kindly disposed. They will stop for the night at one of the other *tabernæ*, and after thou art rested and refreshed Rufus will conduct us to Paul, who hath a letter for thee from Pomponia and sends word to be of good cheer."

Hurrying to the casement Octavia kneeled on the wooden bench and listened intently. The cheering had ceased, and with a strange thrill she heard a clear, strong voice, vibrant with feeling and charged with magnetic power expressing joy and gratitude for such a heartfelt welcome, giving thanks to God for this manifestation of devotion and faith by the believers, and extending an assurance of Christ's love and mercy for all the faithful.

As the resonant voice ceased, the cheering broke out again, and after a little the song which she had heard the wayfarers singing on the Appia, floating back from the distance indicated that the joyful and elated Christians had escorted the speaker to his lodging place.

In the ensuing silence no one spoke in the shadowy chamber, Octavia maintaining her posture at the casement as if in a trance. When the coarse and unpalatable food was brought in she quietly declined to partake of it with the others; and although greatly distressed thereby, upon Lucilla's whispered admonition Pythias forbore urging her.

Wrapped in a *palla* by one of the maids she sat looking up into the starlit sky until Rufus appeared with word that Paul was ready to receive them. Rising quickly, with one of her rare smiles she took Lucilla's arm and, preceded by the centurion and Marcus, they traversed the dark passage, passed through the empty vestibule and crossed to a dingy little *taberna* on the other side of the moonlit

square, deserted except for some prætorians posted at either side.

The centurion in charge of the prisoner was awaiting them. Saluting with grave courtesy he led the way to a sort of shed abutting against a wing of the tavern. At a gesture the guards withdrew, and in response to his summons the voice they had heard addressing the Christians bade them enter.

“Remain as long as thou wilt and without fear of disturbance, since I myself shall wait here with Rufus and Marcus,” said Julius reassuringly to the two women as he closed the door behind them.

Unlighted except by a straggling ray from the moon which found its way through an opening at the east, the small enclosure had barely enough head room for one to stand erect, with only the baked earth for a floor. Apparently designed for storage purposes, a rough wooden bench and a bundle of rushes in the corner constituted the only preparations for its present use.

But to Octavia, in this final attainment of her passionate quest and yearning, no gorgeous and elaborate altar in any of the magnificent Roman temples, presided over by its array of stately priests in their rich vestments, ever had appealed so irresistibly as this squalid, dirty pen, glorified by the presence of the coarsely-clad, travel-worn prisoner—the Apostle of the Christus, at whose feet at last she was kneeling in humble obeisance.

SALVE OCTAVIA, AUGUSTA !

UNDER Nero's rigid orders the fact of Octavia's banishment, and particularly the charge upon which it was predicated, were carefully guarded. It was given out that she had gone to Baia for a change of air; at that season a common diversion of the patricians. And since it was known that she had been accompanied by Marcus and, as it was assumed, by Pythias also, her continued absence excited no comment, as under the prefect's careful dispositions her departure had attracted no attention.

As an additional precaution the people had been diverted by a lavish display of games and distribution of gifts; and misled by their eager demonstrations whenever he appeared in public, Nero and his henchmen incautiously concluded there was no cause for further apprehension. Indeed, the prefect always had maintained that the popular attachment for Octavia had been overrated.

On the Kalends of April at the home of Lucilla on the Cælian, Pythias and Junius Varus were quietly married and at once set out for Cumæ. Directly after the nuptials Marcus repaired to the camp, and after enrollment in the First Cohort was temporarily assigned to the command of Octavia's guard at Baia. On his journey down he was accompanied as far as Sinuessa by Tigellinus, who had acquired some land and was building a villa in Latium.

Perhaps for the last time in his mad career Nero was enjoying a period of absolute complacency. At last he was safely rid of the hated daughter of Claudius, as a result of which his adored Poppæa was radiantly happy

and effusively attentive. His domineering mother and the austere Burrhus were dead, Seneca was cowed, Britannicus and the most important of those who might have pretended to the purple had been destroyed, the Senate and magistrates were obsequious, the prætorians and populace friendly, while throughout Italy and the provinces as well as in Rome everything was peaceful.

In the serenity induced by these happy events for the time being Nero turned his back on the coarser vices and gratified his morbid craving for excitement in driving a chariot in the circus and appearing in the theatres and *stadia* as a poet and singer and in the public competitions between orators, gymnasts and musicians. The lavish acclamation of the crowds convinced the gratified Emperor not only of his popularity but that he had surpassed the most famous of his predecessors in these various accomplishments.

For Octavia the month now drawing to a close had been one of ineffable peace. In the squalid little shed at Appii Forum her hope had been realized. Under the sure, strong guidance of the Apostle all her doubts had been resolved at the foot of the cross; and in an unreserved acceptance of the Lord Jesus as the true and only God, she had found her soul. Thereafter in the seclusion of "her own little temple," to which Paul had opened the door, before the altar of her inner consciousness, in humble worship, in reverent communion, in rapt contemplation, day by day she renewed her allegiance and strengthened the foundations of her belief.

Pomponia had sent her by the Apostle a marvellous story of Christ and his teachings, as related by Mattheus, one of the Twelve chosen by the Lord to spread his gospel among the people. For days after her arrival at Baiæ she had devoted her waking hours to the study of this priceless gift, memorizing many of its most appealing passages.

Upon the arrival of Pythias and Junius at Cumæ, closely followed by that of Marcus in resumption of his

former service, Octavia's cup overflowed. The contemplation of her friend's happiness and the fact of her devoted servitor's presence, satisfied those natural cravings for human affiliation which are cherished at least subconsciously even under the most rapturous exaltation of the spirit.

Twice daily Pythias came to the villa, less than an hour's drive from Cumæ, the road winding to the south along the shores of Avernus and the Lucrine lake. Occasionally Pythias induced her to come to them. But her favorite excursion was to enjoy the sunset from the bold promontory of Misenum. To the west the ghostly outline of fatal Pandataria was visible, beyond in the fiery eye of the declining sun lay Ponza, where Nero, son of the first Agrippina, and others of the imperial family had died in exile, while close by, on the mainland toward the north, uprose the villa where the mother of Nero succumbed to the blows of the imperial assassins. She thought of them not at all—always looking up and beyond into the golden promise, typified in the splendor of the departing luminary, which she knew would return with undiminished glory.

Only once in her conversation with Pythias did Octavia refer even indirectly, to her interview with Paul.

"Lucilla was right," she said one evening when they were together on the promontory. "Those who would follow the Lord Christus must indeed be willing to sacrifice anything He may exact. But He wants us all to be happy, and imposes a burden only when it is for our own eternal good—never from whim or caprice, as doth the Fates. Whatever we learn from any such trial or surrender, that particularly we needed to know: and since it might be apprehended in no other way, 'tis alone from infinite love and tenderest sympathy the sacrifice hath been exacted."

The reasoning was too fine for the pagan woman's comprehension and her only rejoinder was a pressure of the hand and a friendly smile.

But alike for the infamous Emperor, exulting in his selfish, purblind egoism, and the pure and lovely object of his rancorous enmity, momentarily at rest in her spiritual haven, all this was but the calm before the storm.

It was the crippled slave-girl who let loose the thunderbolt which ushered in the tempest. In the final dispersion of Octavia's former attendants at the palace (her establishment on the Esquiline was still maintained under pretense of further occupancy) Eos had been transferred to the service of Poppæa. The terrible threat of Tigellinus had effectively sealed her lips on the subject of Octavia's disgrace. But one day in an acrimonious dispute with a companion, jealous of the newcomer's apparent favor with the Augusta, when taunted with the fact that she had not been chosen to accompany her former mistress, in a burst of malignant triumph Eos announced that Octavia had been banished for adultery.

The girl ran with the story to her lover, one of Poppæa's freedmen, who promptly repeated it to his companions over their wine at the *popina*. One of the guards who conveyed Pythias to the *carcer* happened to be present. He had become enamored of the *popa's* daughter, and instigated by her father the pretty Viola succeeded in extracting enough from her admirer to convince Sergius that Eos had told the truth.

Although a Claudian in sympathy, it was primarily the love of gossip which moved Bulla's loquacious nephew to spread the story broadcast. It ran up and down the *subura* like wildfire, and before evening the city was in a blaze of excitement, which the malcontents speedily fanned into indignation and anger.

Nero had been trying out some new horses in his circus beyond the Tiber, at the foot of the Vatican Mount. In fatuous reliance upon his popularity with the masses, he conceived the idea of driving home in his chariot. Instead of taking the customary route along the Tiber, he struck over to the Flaminian Way, passed through the Porta

Ratumena and climbing the ridge flamboyantly clattered down the narrow Argentarius.

When the chariot approached the Forum and Nero, still in the vulgar attire of an *auriga*, was recognized, instead of the approval and acclaim which the smugly complacent Cæsar had expected, he was greeted by a storm of jeers and vulgar abuse. As the immense crowd which filled the Market Place surged up into the Comitium, the lictors were forced back and the chariot came to a standstill. At first only stupefied by the unexpected outburst, Nero recoiled in fear as the initial cries of derision and contempt gave way to shouts of anger and open menaces. And when the dreaded word "matricide" rang out and was taken up eagerly by the mob, overcome with terror the reins dropped from his nerveless hands and but for the support of the guards who had closed in from behind, he would have fallen from the chariot. It required the combined efforts of the lictors, the guards and the police to force a way through the Jugarius, and the Via Nova was gained only by the most determined effort. The mob followed to the very gates of the palace, shouting imprecations and threats against "Ahenobarbus" and Poppæa and prolonged acclaim of Octavia.

Utterly unnerved by his terrible experience, Nero was frantic with terror until the arrival of two entire cohorts, summoned in hot haste from the camp. Apparently neither the coming of the prætorians nor the approach of darkness had any effect upon the turbulent multitude. If anything the turmoil increased, the demonstration lasting far into the night.

The next day it was even worse. Immense crowds marched through the streets, condemning Nero, threatening Poppæa and hailing Octavia. Placards entitled:

"Orestes, Alcmeon, Nero—*Matricides!*"

were scattered broadcast throughout the city: under cover of the night one even had been affixed to the palace gate.

In the Forum a baby was exposed, fastened to a board on which was written,

“I will not take thee up for fear thou mayst live to slay thy mother!”

Leather sacks were suspended from the statues of Nero—in grim significance of the punishment of a parricide, who was sewed up in a *culleus* with a dog, a cock, an ape and a viper, and thrown into the Tiber.

When all this was reported to Nero, his terrors increased. Messengers had been dispatched to Tigellinus, who still lingered at Sinuessa, but at best he could not be expected within two days. In the prefect's absence the craven Emperor knew not which way to turn. He could not endure the thought of another such night. And about midday, attempting to make up some of his lost sleep, he awoke shrieking that the ghost of Agrippina, coming up out of Tartarus and bearing a flaming torch in her bloody hand, had assailed him with dreadful menaces.

Weeping bitterly he decided upon an abject surrender, from which the angry and scornful Poppæa endeavored in vain to dissuade him: his secretary was summoned and ordered to prepare a decree recalling Octavia from banishment.

The cunning Epaphroditus, however, suggested an expedient which might help to save his master's face, while making success the more assured. Since it was upon the testimony of the slave-girl Eos that Octavia had been convicted, let the witness be forced to recant under torture: then proclaim Octavia's recall as an act of justice alone. The suggestion appealed forcibly to Nero's distorted imagination and sense of the spectacular, and it was put into effect immediately.

Before she was put on the rack it was made plain to Eos what was expected of her; so that confession came readily. Afterward the misguided and unfortunate girl was sent to the Tullianum, from whence speedily her body was thrown on the Gemoniæ. Already criers had passed

through the city proclaiming that Octavia had been convicted upon the perjured testimony of a trusted attendant; that of late Cæsar had been convinced of the injustice and at last had ferreted out the crime. The false witness had confessed and been put to death and Octavia had been recalled from banishment and restored to all her former rights and honors.

Rome went wild over the news of the people's victory. Delirious with joy the populace overthrew the statues of Poppæa, while those of Octavia, wreathed in garlands, were borne in triumphant procession and set up in the Fora and temples. Then, after flocking to the Capitol to thank the gods, a mighty host invaded the Palatine, shouting "*Salve Octavia, Augusta,*" and mingling perfunctory applause of Nero with dreadful maledictions upon Poppæa.

If Tigellinus had been present their punishment would have been terrible. But under the affrighted Nero's orders the soldiers merely drove them away with whips—which indeed may have been the wiser method as a significant reminder of their absolutely servile condition. For once the populace had registered its will—then apparently frightened by their complete success, the people turned and fled! The outbreak had worn itself out, and as in many such instances of popular rebellion, ultimately the spoils of victory went to the vanquished.

THE BLANDISHMENTS OF POPPÆA

POPPÆA was furious at the insults of the populace and the Emperor's pusillanimity. Peremptorily refusing to see Nero, she remained secluded in her apartments, making life miserable for her attendants, who found it impossible to please her and were severely punished for the most trivial errors.

Chagrined by this additional blow to his pride, Cæsar cowered in sullen anger, impatiently awaiting the return of Tigellinus, without whose support he dared not appear in public, while depending upon him also in overcoming Poppæa's resentment.

Arriving the next day, the prefect listened with grim amusement to the Emperor's excited harangue. Surprised at the extent of the popular outbreak, at heart he was not ill-pleased with what had occurred. The alarm of Nero and the necessities of Poppæa in the end would redound to his own greater profit and advantage.

"A few malcontents have incited them," he said with quiet reassurance. "After the ring-leaders have been thrown to the wild beasts in the *vivaria*, the others will suffocate thee with their repentant plaudits.

"As to the Augusta, it is different," he continued gravely. "In truth hath she not cause for complaint? Affronted and maligned, in thy failure to defend and succor her she found her greatest humiliation. Still a woman should not be allowed to get the upper hand. Leave her alone for awhile. Even provoke her further by taking up with another—Acte mayhap, who still wor-

shippeth thee as a god," with a covert sneer. "But perchance first it were well for me to talk with her?" And upon Nero's eager acquiescence the cunning prefect sought the Augusta, whose messenger, bearing a peremptory summons, had intercepted him on his way to the palace.

In surprising disregard of the possible effect upon her carefully guarded beauty, Poppæa gave full rein to her angry emotions. She railed at Cæsar as a consummate coward, sneered at the prætorians for using whips instead of their swords, furiously demanded wholesale vengeance upon the people, and upbraided the prefect for his obtuse negligence.

"I admit my error and that I underestimated the strange hold this woman hath upon the populace," he answered placatingly. "And yet but for that crooked slave-girl, who I doubt not was at the bottom of the mischief, there would have been no trouble.

"I will take care of the wrong-doers," he continued darkly, "but 'tis for thee to discipline Cæsar. He is crest-fallen and ready to do anything to win thy forgiveness: what wouldst thou have?"

"I would have the life of the mawkish daughter of Messalina, who put my own mother to death," she cried vindictively. "I told thee at the outset 'tis the only way."

"Let her die then," he said carelessly; "and with one more ghost to terrorize him Cæsar will find his due punishment and afterwards be held in subjection the more readily.

"He is planning to annoy thee by taking up Acte again. Remain indifferent, and hold him at arm's length until I give the signal—then in thine own way bring him to his knees, extort his consent to Octavia's exile, and leave the rest to me"; and after he had rapidly outlined his plan to the gratified Empress, the prefect returned to the anxiously expectant Emperor.

"She is like a raging tigress, and for the moment thou wouldst better leave her alone and do as I said. Send for

Acte, show thyself in the city, assemble the Augustians—and after her anger subsides, break her to thy will, as befits Cæsar.”

Although disappointed and uneasy, Nero acquiesced, and with only the usual complement of guards, after a visit to the camp, where he received an uproarious welcome from the prætorians, drove through the Campus Martius and the Forum. All went as Tigellinus had predicted: either the fickle, servile mob already had forgotten its riotous demonstration in the cause of outraged morality, or sought to make amends in the extravagance of its present greetings.

Under the consequent reaction from his fears, Nero's thoughts turned the more eagerly to the beautiful woman who had enslaved him: so that he was not disappointed by the non-appearance of Acte. Discreetly advised by Tigellinus as to her former protector's real motive, she excused her absence with a plea of indisposition. But the Augustians, accompanied by their fair companions, came in full force, with appetites sharpened by three days' abstinence; and in eager emulation of the dissolute crew, the Emperor abandoned himself to an all-night's carousal.

The prefect's scheme to satisfy both Nero and Poppæa was as simple as he believed it sure. When the Emperor began to respond to the fiery wines, one of the attendants handed a letter to Tigellinus which, after reading with pretended surprise, he presented to Cæsar. The missive was from the Augusta, who wrote that having learned Nero had sent for Acte, she was resolved to leave the palace and return to the house of Otho—requesting the prefect to come at once for discussion of the necessary arrangements.

Aghast at Poppæa's threat, Nero's expression of drunken dismay was so ludicrous Tigellinus found difficulty in preserving his gravity.

“Jealousy hath done its work, and the time is ripe for thee,” he whispered. “Go thou in my place, and if not to

the authority of Cæsar, she will yield to the persuasion of love—throw me in the *vivarium* with those others if I prove a false oracle. Come quickly, or the bird may have flown”; and with a significant gesture for the revellers, who responded with shouts of laughter and applause, he led the excited, half-drunken Emperor from the room.

“Cæsar hath come in response to the Augusta’s request—thou needst not announce him,” he said to the smirking major-domo: and as the Emperor unsteadily advanced towards the inner doorway, with a coarse laugh Tigellinus turned back to rejoin the tipsy crew in the triclinium.

Poppæa had planned her attack with painstaking care, having in view the two weakest points in Nero’s defenses—his cowardice and his sensuality.

In evident preparation for its abandonment, the luxurious apartment was in the greatest disorder. Otho’s house had supplied the greater part of the furnishings and ornaments—now heaped promiscuously about the baskets and boxes in which the busy slaves were re-packing them.

Poppæa herself had been directing the work, and doubtless for greater freedom of movement was clad only in a gauzy, sleeveless *tunica*. Her string of pearls and every other ornament had been laid aside—even her favorite jewelled slippers replaced by tiny sandals, fastened about her slim ankles with white thongs. Wearied of her task, and a prey to melancholy, at the moment of Nero’s arrival she had thrown herself dejectedly upon a low ebony couch. As she leaned forward to rest her head upon her hand, the loose-fitting garment had slidden down over her arm, disclosing freely the dazzling neck and rounded shoulder upon which her loosely-braided hair clustered in rich profusion. In the clear mellow light of a tall bronze candelabrum, advantageously placed, every line of the exquisitely moulded form was discernible—the warm flesh tints, discreetly softened by the amethystine *tunica*, in forcible contrast with the purple-cushioned couch.

Never had she appeared more alluring or appealed so irresistibly to the besotted young Emperor. Reclining before him all unconsciously, in her youthful freshness, her unstudied grace, the illusive loveliness of her delicate patrician beauty and her voluptuous charm, to his erotic fancy she was the goddess of love personified; and the thought that he was losing her filled him with mingled terror and impotent rage. It was true, as the prefect had reminded him, that he possessed the attributes of divinity and the power of the overlord; but under the confusion of his senses all idea of exerting "the authority of Cæsar" to restrain her vanished in the consuming madness of his desire for her voluntary submission.

For a moment he stood irresolutely. The well-trained attendants made no sign, and in her pensive abstraction Poppæa also seemed unaware that anyone had entered the room. Hesitatingly he tiptoed his way towards the couch until suddenly, losing all self-control, he threw himself forward, seized Poppæa's hand, and kissing it passionately burst into tears.

With a low cry Poppæa struggled to her feet, and while Nero grovelled before her, babbling wildly, at an imperious glance from their mistress, the slaves silently withdrew.

As the door closed softly behind them the elated Augusta looked down in smiling triumph at the grotesque figure whimpering at her feet; then carefully composing her features she said coldly:

"It is not meet that Cæsar should kneel to a disgraced and forsaken woman—even though it be only in the drunken frenzy which thy profligate associates have induced"; adding bitterly as he looked up in maudlin protest:

"Go back to thy Georgian freedwoman and her lowborn companions, and leave the unhappy wife of Otho to depart in peace."

"'Tis a falsehood—Acte is not at the palace," he shouted, scrambling to his feet. "'Twas that meddle-

some Tigellinus who sent for her and when he told me I forbade her coming," he lied glibly.

"No!" she cried sharply as he reached out his hands; and avoiding him by a quick movement, glided behind one of the packing chests. "Even if I could believe thee in this, thou hast shamed me before the Roman people, casting aside the mother of thy unborn child for the despised daughter of Claudius who, although barren to Cæsar, will compensate thee with the spawn of an Egyptian flute-player. When at the bare promise of her recall the mob dishonors the statues Cæsar himself erected and shouts its vulgar abuse of the Augusta at thy very gates, what would be my unhappy fate if found in the palace after she actually returns?"

As the drivelling Nero again fell on his knees, protesting his love, imploring her forgiveness, vowing vengeance upon her traducers and promising anything she might exact in reparation, Poppæa decided that the crucial moment had arrived.

With quivering lips and hands pressed against her heaving bosom, she cried brokenly:

"Thou didst tempt me, the honored wife of Otho, to what thou insisted was a higher duty and nobler destiny. 'Tis true that in the end my own passion outran thine—as it hath outlasted it: the dearest object of my life to be thy honored Empress, to give thy house a legitimate heir and to solace thee with such a love as thou alone ever awakened in my heart. Oh! what crime have I committed that my happiness should be destroyed and life itself jeopardized by the slaves and partisans of a woman whose hatred and contempt for thee are even greater than Poppæa's love and admiration, if that be possible? Canst not blind Cæsar understand that 'tis not anger, nor the desire for vengeance—but the sufferings of wounded affection that hath driven me?"

Blinded by sudden tears, she groped her way back to the couch, apostrophizing the gods with arms upraised;

and sinking upon the cushions, her head drooped and she sobbed convulsively.

Nero was seized with a sort of vertigo. His eyes rolled wildly. The veins in his bull-neck swelled almost to bursting. Tearing at his throat in a frenzy, he shrieked dreadful curses upon Octavia and her minions, declaring he would send them all to Hades. Then darting forward he seized Poppæa's hands and pressed them against his burning temples, uttering little animal cries under his breath as he laid his head upon her knees and clasped her about the ankles.

As she struggled artfully against him, in his madness he reached up and caught at her shoulder. Under her skillful resistance the flimsy garment gave way, and with a startled cry she partly rose, then fell back in modest confusion.

It was the final appeal to his drunken passion and in-born sensuality. As she cowered before him in her dishevelled loveliness, fear, vanity, cruelty, ambition, the love of power—all were swept away in the vortex of desire; and as he fell inertly by her side, Poppæa knew she had won! Gently caressing the bloated face as she pressed his head close against her breast, and tenderly kissing the closed eyes, she whispered softly:

“For thee and me it will be one long, earthly Elysium, after thou hast sent her into the shadows!”

THE SHAMEFUL ACCUSATION

ON the morning of the day before the Kalends of June Cæsar drove in state to the camp beyond the Esquiline, where the prefect was awaiting him with the entire command drawn up in the prætorium.

In all the symbolic display of the imperial office—clothed in the Tyrian purple, crowned with the Delphic laurel, and bearing the eagle-tipped sceptre of ivory—to the thunderous welcome of the expectant cohorts Nero mounted the tribunal and delivered a carefully-prepared *adlocutio*.

First flattering his auditors with a tribute to their valor and patriotism, he craftily magnified their sense of importance by the frank admission that the approval of the prætorians was a *sine qua non* in the choice of an Emperor by the magistrates.

Reminding them that it was his great ancestor, the divine Augustus, who first constituted the command upon its present honorable and enduring basis as the Emperor's personal bodyguard, he expressed heartfelt thanks to the gods that the prætorians never had failed in their loyal devotion to the imperial family. Reciting the various treasonable endeavors during the rule of his predecessors to subvert the will of the magistrates and the army, he referred particularly to the occasion when after the death of Caligula the vigilance and determination of the guards preserved the succession in the family of Germanicus; to their similarly effective service in foiling the conspiracy of Messalina and Caius Silius; and finally to their un-

swerving support of himself in his hour of danger and depression at the time of Agrippina's treasonable effort to corrupt the fleet.

Now he was menaced by another base attempt to foment a rebellion—to his sorrow and bitter humiliation likewise emanating from a member of his own family—the wife whom regretfully he had been compelled to put away because of her failure to give an heir to the principate.

Again and again she had opposed and assailed him. But thus far he had overlooked her offenses on account of her youth and inexperience, the regard in which she was held by the people in their generous sympathy and compassion for her earlier misfortunes, and especially because of his conviction that she had been the pitiful tool of the corrupt and desperate men under whose sinister influence she had fallen. In his anxious desire for her regeneration he had gone so far even as to restore her to the proud eminence of imperial consort, the honor of which she had scorned and its duties and obligations, public and private, she had flouted.

They were aware of the dastardly attack upon him in the Forum and the subsequent assault upon his privacy and the honor of his household, from which themselves had rescued him. Even under that extreme provocation he had not forgotten that he was the Father of his people; they would recall that it was through his forbearance the misguided populace had been repulsed with whips instead of the sword.

But what they had not known, he continued with rising emotion, was that this later attack and affront had been provoked in the interest of the infamous wretch who had supplanted him in Octavia's affections. Unfortunately for the arch-traitor—doubtless in the providence of the gods—some impatient underlings, eager to earn their bribe, taking advantage of the absence of the prefect let loose the mob before the plot was finally perfected. And when at last to the conspirators everything seemed in readiness

to strike a determined blow, thanks to the tireless energy and the high intelligence of the prætorian prefect, that very morning the plot had been uncovered and the leader taken!

Roused to the highest pitch the excited prætorians hung upon Nero's every word and gesture as, throwing to the winds all previous affectation of sorrow and distress on account of Octavia, he declared in gloating triumph:

"This time it is not upon the false evidence of a revengeful slave, suborned to distract attention from the real criminal, that Octavia's virtue hath been assailed. Now her guilt is proven by the open confession of the adulterer himself, made voluntarily before the Imperial Court of inquiry!" And stretching out his ivory sceptre to check the angry murmur which ran up and down the serried ranks, with livid face and furious gesture he shouted hoarsely:

"'Tis Anicetus, the Admiral of the fleet—the same who struck down Agrippina when I from filial tenderness would have banished her only: and, as I now believe, his boasted zeal at that time was but a cloak to hide his own complicity! Before the *consilium* he hath admitted his adultery with Octavia, who it is believed corrupted him in hopes of enlisting the fleet at Misenum, where unsuspectingly I have allowed her to remain!"

Forgetful of all discipline, or in the certainty that its breach would be overlooked, the prætorians broke ranks and indulged in the wildest demonstrations—frantically waving their weapons as they called down curses on Anicetus, whose death, as well as that of all the conspirators, they demanded. And while there were not a few—notably in the First Cohort—who remained silent, their attitude was indicative of dismay and sorrow rather than opposition or distrust.

It was long before the tumult subsided enough for Nero to be heard. Reverting to his former pretense of consideration for Octavia, he concluded gravely:

“The *Lex Julia de Adulteriis* permits the husband to put the adulterer to death—but not the wife. Even were it otherwise, since already I had divorced her and thus there is no question of fouling the Imperial line, I would shrink from inflicting such a punishment upon the daughter of an Emperor who hath been enrolled among the gods. But if upon further inquiry it shall be proven also that Octavia actually participated in the treasonable design of her paramour, it will remain for the magistrates to determine how far Cæsar must yield his sensibilities to the welfare of the State.

“For the present Octavia will be exiled, and the justice of Cæsar meted out to the adulterer. Already the decree is in preparation and will be promulgated at midday. Incited by the conspirators and the malcontents, from those who hitherto have cherished the unfortunate woman for the imaginary virtues she hath displayed unthinking opposition and protest may arise. In such an emergency your unhappy *Imperator* relies upon the valor and devotion of the prætorians to support the *consilium* in its just judgment.”

“It was a great effort and altogether worthy of thee,” said Tigellinus, in genuine surprise at Nero’s cunning and effective harangue. “In truth, Seneca himself could not have spoken more convincingly nor prated more eloquently of marital duty and virtuous renunciation,” he added drily. “Octavia hath not a partisan left in the camp—even Marcus would have been alienated if he could have heard thee. Now leave the rest to me. Go back to the palace, and with the Augusta stay under cover until I give thee word. It will not be long: if I mistake not, before another sun for Poppæa and thee the streets of Rome will be as safe as the Atrium of Vesta.

“As for the Admiral—Hercules! ’tis well he hath started for Sardinia: if ever he returneth to Rome, to save time and trouble he would better come in a funeral litter!”

“*Certe*, he deserves a better fate, having served us well,” grinned Nero. “How didst persuade him to sign the confession?”

“In truth he demurred strongly,” said the prefect, “until, when cajolery failed, I gave him the choice between banishment to a delightful retreat with a large reward—and the Gemoniæ after the rack. Then he came readily—while begging that in mercy Cæsar would ‘commute’ his punishment from banishment to exile!”

As the elated and vainglorious Nero left the prætorium, the air was rent with a mighty shout—“Hail! Germanicus! Death to the enemies of Cæsar!” The prefect had announced the Emperor’s generous donation to his faithful guard, in order that the prætorians might fittingly enjoy the holiday which was proclaimed.

The great gates had scarcely closed behind the imperial *cortège* before they opened again to disgorge the rollicking troops in eager and enthusiastic quest of an afternoon’s entertainment which was peculiarly to their liking. With the exception of a single company detailed to guard the camp—under arrangement for relief at periodic intervals by like contingents, respectively returning for similar brief service—the entire command made its spectacular descent upon the wondering city—the idlers staring in amazement at so strange and inexplicable an occurrence.

The wine shops and eating places in the *subura* and Campus Martius were the prætorians’ first objective; then they swung down into the Forum, climbed the Palatine and the Capitoline, swarmed about the basilicas and congregated in the porticoes and squares. But all through the afternoon and far into the night they were continually reappearing in the *popinæ* and *tabernæ*, not only the sources of bibulous and alimentary refreshment, but regarded also as the most probable starting points of popular ebullition.

The gates of the city had been closed and all the reserves called out. Ten companies of the *milites stationarii*

were detailed by the prefect of the city to guard the approaches to the palace, and the entire seven cohorts of the *vigiles* patrolled the streets under the direct supervision of the prefect of police. Thus under the skilful coördination of Tigellinus and the other two prefects all three branches of the service entrusted with the policing of the city and the protection of the sovereignty were working in unison, prepared for vigorous action in case of popular outbreak, noisy demonstration or the slightest indication of disturbance.

As a slave called the seventh hour the palace gates were flung open and a loud-voiced crier proclaimed the report of the imperial tribunal—made up of the friends whom Nero had summoned as a Council. It recited the confession of Anicetus and declared the guilt of Octavia, who with the adulterer was remanded to Cæsar for punishment. Simultaneously, it was cried in all the important public places, while copies were conspicuously posted throughout the city and at the gates.

The bolt fell out of a clear sky, and the astounding event was announced with such dramatic force and effect that the people were stupefied. Here and there angry and indignant cries were heard; but invariably they were drowned in the salvos of applause for Cæsar and Poppæa from the Emperor's satellites and the ubiquitous prætorians. For the incautious ones who ventured to rail at Nero or curse the Augusta a brawny fist or blow with the sword was never wanting, while those who were too outspoken or clamorous, after a merciless beating up by the guards were roughly dragged away by the police. And thus speedily it became apparent that any repetition of the previous outbreak would spell disaster for the participants.

The following morning when Tigellinus passed through the *subura* and the Forum on his way to the palace, there was neither evidence of unrest nor indication whatsoever that anything unusual had occurred. Moreover his lieu-

tenants had reported that not one of the Council's placards had been torn down in the night—than which there could be no stronger assurance that the populace had accepted the situation.

"All is ended happily," he said to the radiant Poppæa (Nero had not yet arisen after a night's debauch). "Let Cæsar publish his edict and go abroad with thee to receive the homage all Rome is eager to display; the thoughts of the rabble are centered upon the games announced for the morrow."

"And Octavia?" she queried with burning intensity.

"On the third night she will be at Pandataria, and before the Ides—crossing the Styx with Charon."

"If Cæsar doth not change his mind," she rejoined cynically. "I shall believe only when the deed is done; and of that I must have proof."

"Hold him tight, and keep the virtuous Seneca, the Consul Vestinus and Thræsea Petus at a distance but another two days and the gods themselves could not save her," he said with cold finality. "As for proof, for an hundred *aurei* Saturninus will bring thee her head."

Her eyes lighted evilly: "Give him the money to divide among his men and say there will be another hundred for himself when he showeth me."

In the splendor of the early June evening, on the terrace at serene and peaceful Cumæ, Pythias and her husband were awaiting a promised visit from Octavia. The next morning Varus was to start for Rome on some business relating to his uncle's estate, and the impending separation was the first shadow of which they had been conscious during their month of blissful happiness.

"But I shall return before the Ides," he said, breaking the long silence, as he caressed the dark head which leaned against him.

Withdrawing her gaze from the shimmering sea, with a mischievous light in her eyes Pythias rejoined archly:

“Unless Quintilla halteth thee with one of her old-time appeals!”

“The woman who could detain me when thou art waiting hath never lived. For thee and me death will be the only *divortium*. Tell me once more thou art happy and satisfied?”

“‘*Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia*’; always have I loved thee since the evening on the Palatine when thou gavest me the rose,” she whispered with averted face.

The sound of rapid hoof-beats coming up the road from Baïæ aroused them, and breaking away Pythias ran into the vestibule, waving gaily to Marcus, whom she recognized as the foremost of the two horsemen who clattered through the gateway. But noting his sombre face and tense expression as he came on after dismounting, her heart contracted painfully and she recoiled with a low exclamation.

“Hola, Marcus! Why racing up the hill in all the heat?” cried the unobservant Junius; then as the tribune’s companion approached with outstretched hand, “By the gods, ’tis Decius!” he shouted in surprise: “Thrice welcome, old comrade!”

Before the other could speak, Marcus rasped out,

“Better curse than welcome him—who, with Saturninus and a guard of Germans at his heels, hath come to drag me back to Rome, virtually a prisoner. Summon all thy fortitude”—with a burning glance at the terrified Pythias, “since there is not a moment to temper the recital by roundabout or pretense.

“A *consilium* hath found Octavia guilty of adultery and conspiracy with Anicetus the Admiral, Cæsar hath exiled her to Pandataria, and Saturninus is coming to take her there—without a single maid or attendant. Gods! Why did I not finish the cursed prefect—and Cæsar too, at the Milvian bridge!” And he groaned with impotent rage.

Dumb with horror, Pythias leaned weakly against her husband, who stared in dismay until, admonished by his

companion, Marcus collected himself by a mighty effort and continued earnestly:

"Within an hour Saturninus will reach Baïæ; then, under the orders, with the old guard I must withdraw immediately. Leaving the men at Sinuessa for the night, Decius and I will press on—ostensibly for Rome, but at Tarricina remain in hiding and under cover of darkness tomorrow evening set out for the island. Here is one with me to the end"—seizing the arm of his companion, who acquiesced grimly. "I know not what we can do—mayhap get her away to Rhegium, and thence to the East, where among the believers in her new faith she may find concealment and safety until a dagger shall dispose of Nero. But at least that foul centurion shall never return to claim the promised blood-money of which Decius heard him boast in a drunken carousal on the boat from Forum Appii"—his voice breaking under the passions which convulsed him.

"In truth, since this time Decius will be on our side, not one of the hirelings should escape us," cried Junius with answering emotion.

"No," Marcus rejoined firmly, "'tis not for thee. There is one who needs thee more"—with a glance at the eagerly attentive Pythias. "It is other assistance for which I have come. Lend me thy purse, and thy freedman, Lupus, who knows the boatmen at Tarricina and can assemble a crew who for gold will adventure anything."

Lucius shook his head obstinately: "Either I go with thee, or in the galley with Lupus and his friends—leaving thee to provide thine own outfit, which would be both difficult and fraught with danger," he said with cold finality.

"And in order that Octavia shall have a woman by her side when whatsoever the Fates decree shall befall, I shall go with him: we have as much right as thou and Decius!" Pythias cried defiantly.

"By the Furies I could choke thee, Junius," the tribune

shouted angrily. "But summon thy man quickly—already we have tarried overlong. If before our return that insolent brute should arrive and affront Octavia, who hath not yet been told—gods! I could not keep my hands from his throat, which would be the end!" And with a frantic gesture he turned towards his horse.

But Decius managed to restrain him until Junius appeared, followed by a man of swarthy complexion, with piercing black eyes and resolute expression, whose physique and muscular development were scarcely inferior to those of Marcus himself.

"Lupus says 'twill be easy to secure a galley, with rowers who will follow down through Avernus if needs be, and himself will lead them. We shall start within the hour, taking the shore road and doubtless reach Tarri-cina before thee. But 'tis wiser not to be seen together. Go thou to the *caupona* of Libanus, the Syrian, in a lane which, near the foot of the rock, leads from the Via Anxur: any sailor will direct thee. Tell the *caupo* thou hast an affair with Lupus and would remain in seclusion until he comes, which will not be until nightfall. Here is half of the gold, to guard against mischance—and may the gods attend thee!"

As without a word the two men ran to their horses, Pythias called out brokenly:

"Say that I shall think of her every hour, Marcus; that she must be of good cheer and pray to her god—as shall I to Juno Moneto—for protection and guidance until the storm passeth!"

Without turning the tribune waved his hand, and urging their mounts to their utmost speed, in a moment the riders passed out of view at the bend where the road began its spiral descent.

THE MARTYRDOM OF VIRTUE

UNHEEDING the eager admonition of a boatman, Octavia entered the bireme left-foot foremost, a sinister omen at the outset of a journey. Thrusting the man aside Saturninus cried sharply, with an ugly leer:

“Cross not the path of the gods when they choose to give their own warning!”

In nonchalant disregard Octavia calmly took her place in the little deck house of wickerwork, roofed with canvas, at the stern of the ship. No omens were necessary to prepare her for what impended. She had left Rome in the firm belief that her death had been decreed, and not once during the succeeding period of tranquillity had she entertained the faintest hope of any other outcome.

In hurriedly breaking the news to her on his return from Cumæ, the blunt-spoken tribune found it impossible to cloud its significance. She apprehended that at last the end so long anticipated was at hand. If there had remained the slightest uncertainty it would have vanished when coincident with the departure of Marcus her maids were withdrawn and she was subjected to close confinement, under the surveillance of Saturninus and his coarse, unfeeling subordinates. Then early in the second day she had been rudely awakened and without a moment for preparation taken to the landing, compelled to make the journey on foot, like the commonest malefactor.

Not a breath of wind was stirring in the sheltered harbor of Misenum—one of the two naval stations of the

early Empire—when the bireme weighed anchor, and with its sail stowed, the imperial ensign drooping from the solitary mast, under propulsion of its double bank of oars, threaded its way among the sailing vessels, war craft and innumerable small boats which dotted the placid surface of the bay.

As they approached the headland a light breeze sprang up, and the rowers pausing while the one square sail was being unbent, Octavia turned for a last look at the receding shore line and the animated scene in the foreground.

Flashing in the sunlight the small boats darted to and fro, their occupants, clad in bright colors, exchanging lively greetings and good-natured banter. From some galleys pulling in towards the land happy laughter and snatches of song rippled through the air. Confused cries and shouts rose faintly from the more distant sailing vessels, floating gracefully upon the gentle swell. Their dark lines accentuated by the glittering shafts which scintillated from brazen beaks and figureheads, the war craft lay in momentary silence; then from their decks rose a salvo of cheers as the imperial colors broke out from a huge, incoming trireme, flanked on either side by long bars of silvery sheen as the sparkling drops fell from more than eighty pairs of oars, moving in perfect rhythm. The crystal air, the translucent water and the golden sunshine pouring down from above the encircling cliffs, with their stately villas sharply outlined against the deep blue sky, united to form the setting of a picture of surpassing loveliness which, at the moment, might have seemed impossible of destruction either by human discord or elemental storm.

How often during her stay at Baiæ, from the rocky heights incuriously she had looked down upon it all! And tomorrow, the next day and the next, it would be the same; the same dancing, golden sunshine, the same exuberance of life, the same vibrant note of human joy and sentient happiness—while for herself—and at thought of the

dreadful ordeal awaiting her on that bleak and desolate island, alone with the centurion and his brutish companions, there came such a sharp stab of terror that a low cry broke from her pallid, trembling lips. For the first time her highborn Roman courage gave way. Dark, menacing clouds swept across her vision, a heavy weight seemed to be crushing her, and as her spirit quailed before the horrid specters which a tortured imagination conjured up, with a pitiful sob she fell back upon the wooden bench, in broken whispers imploring the Lord Christus to spare her.

The early promise of the June morning soon vanished. Clouds gathered along the sky-line whence they climbed and spread until the blue vault was completely overcast. The horizon disappeared behind a curtain of impenetrable mist. Gradually shifting into the south, the wind blew stronger, rolling up great waves directly in the line of their course; and under the necessity of frequent tacking to avoid the trough of the seas, the task of the rowers, arduous under the most favorable conditions, grew more and more wearisome. The ship pitched unpleasantly, and most of the soldiers became violently seasick—the favored few shouting taunts and ribald gibes at their unfortunate companions, lashed to the stanchions for safety.

To the forlorn prisoner, tossed about in the fragile deckhouse, weak from lack of food, exhausted by her inner struggles, and scourged by the malignant glances and insulting remarks of Saturninus and the guards, cursing and threatening her as the cause of their discomfort, the weary hours seemed endless. Never had she so yearned for privacy and seclusion. If only she might cry out her agony and despair, unheard and unseen except by the merciful God! She could imagine no other way of relief either from her bodily pain or mental anguish.

So that although for her the end of the voyage was to mark the near approach of death, the fear of which had clutched at her heart like an icy hand ever since her

nervous breakdown off the Cape, not even the exhausted rowers themselves rejoiced more than she when at last the laboring bireme worked its way under the lea of the rock-bound isle and shortly found its haven in a little sheltered cove.

Pandataria, the modern Vendutené, is a low volcanic island some thirty miles west of Misenum and a like distance south of Tarricina, the ancient town of Anxur in Latium, where the Via Appia reaches the sea sixty miles from Rome. To this lonely and forbidden rock, or to the similar island of Ponza, still further west, certain members of the imperial family customarily were sent under nominal sentence of exile, in order temporarily to conceal the death to which actually they were destined.

The house provided for Cæsar's involuntary guests rose from the bare rock, close to the sea, its cold, repellant exterior and bleak surroundings unrelieved by either tree, shrub or vine. Except a low, cheerless structure for use of the guard, some hundred paces to the left, no other building was in sight.

Night was at hand and a drizzling rain falling when the landing party, conducted from the wharf by a subaltern, approached the lonely, somber dwelling. A man and woman, advanced in years, were waiting at the entrance. The prisoner was consigned to their care, and after the door closed behind them it was fastened from without, and Saturninus proceeded with his men to the barracks.

Freed at last from their hated presence, Octavia's heart lightened. And, when in answer to her question the old man said his only orders were that until arrival of the centurion in the morning none might either leave or enter the house, her relief was unbounded. Alone with the deferential slaves and, as she believed, safe from intrusion, for the time being the frowning prison became for her a veritable sanctuary. After changing her garments, drenched by the flying spray, she ate sparingly of the simple repast to which she was summoned by the wrinkled old woman;

then, declining the latter's offer of assistance, withdrew again to the curtained alcove assigned as her resting place.

The old couple quietly retired to their own quarters. The smoky oil lamps had been extinguished and there was not a sound in the house, while through a small window opening, high up near the ceiling, came the mournful sighing of the wind and the roar of the surf against the rocks. Never had the delicate daughter of the Cæsars experienced such utter solitude, such inattention or human aloofness. But the resulting painful impressions speedily lost their force in a recurrence of the sense of safety which, under the circumstances, her very isolation induced.

After a whispered prayer to her God, she lay down upon the rough pallet and fell asleep. Calm and untroubled at first, with the passing hours her slumber was clouded with disquieting dreams, for the most part a jumble of ghostly pictures out of the dreadful past, the events so weirdly distorted as to accentuate their horrors.

Under the arbor in the gardens of Asiaticus, in the dim light of the Gaul's lantern, a dishevelled, white-robed figure was lying in a bloody pool: and as she fell on her knees, frantically imploring her mother to speak to her, the pallid lips parted with a dying curse for the child who had betrayed her to the assassins!

On the bench beneath the ilexes, flooded in silver moonlight, again she was sitting with her beloved. A hand stretched out from behind struck a knife into his breast, and he slid from her embrace to the ground. Then Nero appeared, and spurning with his foot the quivering form, said with a sneer:

"Now art thou freed from the hateful *patria potestas*, and instead of wedding against thy will, mayst choose thine own lover!"

Dumb with terror, in vain she tried to cry out—to repulse him. He held her close until the shadowy attend-

ants started off with their burden; then thrusting her away, with a mocking laugh bade her follow Silanus to Hades and seek his forgiveness for her treachery.

Long weary years she waited at the dark entrance to the underworld—vainly hoping that the spirit of Lucius might appear. At last through the rent earth from Tartarus the ghost of Agrippina emerged, a flaming torch in her bloody hand, and stood beside her.

“’Tis a wedding torch, with which an avenging mother shall convert the vile bridal couch of Nero and the adulterous Poppæa into their funeral pyre!” said the Augusta, in hollow, colorless tones; then, in sudden recognition of her stepdaughter, she cried furiously:

“Thou art the guilty one—the first cause of the crimes which have engulfed the family of Cæsar! ’Tis thou who didst make a monster of the once innocent babe I suckled—by thee minded to poison thy father and brother, to slay thy affianced, and send the assassins to his mother’s bedside.

“Forever be thou accursed! And by the avenging Furies deprived of funeral rites, forbidden a resting place among the shades thy soul shall wander homeless on the earth!”

With a loud scream Octavia escaped from the unseen hands which would have dragged her into the gloom and the hideous vision was broken. Dazed and unstrung, she lay inertly, with eyes partly closed, until roused to full consciousness by the insistent pressure of a hand upon her shoulder; then, in the sudden flare of a lamp, she recognized Saturninus, who was standing by her bedside, his men peering intently from behind.

“*Perpol*, thy slumber is sound, and hard to disrupt; yet even more so will prove the sleep that impends. But since at last thou art awake, detain us no longer: ’tis long past the midnight hour, and the day is at hand, the fifth before the Ides, by Cæsar’s orders chosen for thy death. Come

quickly then, before my men grow rude: already they are impatient to be gone, and enjoy their share of the Augusta's dole."

With wildly beating heart Octavia shrank back in deadly fear. But although the person and utterance of the speaker were dreadfully real and distinct, bravely she tried to persuade herself that it was only another episode in the frightful dream—that under a show of resistance these ghostly intruders would vanish as did the others.

Summoning all her will, she rose from the couch and with averted face sought to escape. Momentarily the guards fell back: then at a sign from their leader two of them laid hold of her, and struggling feebly she was borne down a passage which led to the bath, and there laid on a bench beside the marble basin.

All her powers of resistance were at an end. She made no protest while they bound her ankles, and without apparent emotion heard the centurion sharply order his men to stand aside that the physician might perform his task. But as the robe was torn from her shoulders and her arms drawn forward, with a last supreme effort she rallied her failing senses and in a broken whisper repeated the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane from the *epistola* Pomponia had sent by Paul—that impassioned plea of the Divine Sufferer, "sorrowful even unto death," which ever must remain the last resort in the hour of unbearable human agony.

"O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it—thy will be done"; and with the first spurt of blood from the severed veins, mercifully relapsed into unconsciousness.

A moment later, observing that the hemorrhage had stopped, Saturninus said impatiently:

"Hast lost thy skill, Macro; quick, another stroke of the knife and bring it to an end before word comes that again Cæsar hath changed his mind and the chance to gain the Augusta's promised gold shall be lost."

"It were idle," the watchful physician quietly rejoined. "Both veins are fully severed: either 'tis a lethargy induced by fear or, as is the more probable, a fainting hath checked the flow. There is a way to hasten it for which, in anticipation, all is prepared; but time will be required, and if thou canst not wait, a sword thrust through the body—"

The centurion shook his head: "Cæsar's orders were imperative. While drunk he told the prefect the bloody sword which pierced Agrippina yet haunts his nightly visions; that one such terror was enough, and if other than the physician's knife were raised against Octavia, the guilty one should be torn asunder on the rack. Proceed as thou hast planned—but act quickly: the wine and dice are waiting."

Two of the guards were summoned from the passageway, and lifting the senseless form they followed the others to an adjoining division of the bath, situated directly over the *hypocaust*, or furnace, its hollow walls forming a great flue, filled with superheated air. As the men laid their burden on the mosaic floor, Marco pulled from the wall a tile capped with a bronze ring, and a rush of hot vapor poured into the cell-like room; whereupon all hastily departed, bolting the narrow door which was the chamber's only aperture.

Early in the morning following their arrival at Taricina Marcus and his companions embarked in a galley, manned by a dozen stalwart boatmen, easily persuaded to adventure upon the mysterious service for which their pay was to be so munificent. In obstinate disregard of the tribune's protest—in which she was supported by her husband—Pythias accompanied them, cleverly disguised as a slave boy.

To divert suspicion, Lupus had noised it about that they were bound for Formiæ; and for a while the galley followed the coast in its easterly trend. Halfway to the

cape, well beyond the limit of vision from the starting point, they headed directly for the island, lying due south.

The same head wind and rolling seas which impeded the bireme made the voyage almost impossible for the galley, and it required all the persuasive powers of the freedman, fortified with the promise of an additional lavish dole, to induce the men to persist in what seemed a hopeless task. For hours they battled desperately against the heavy seas which threatened to engulf them, barely holding their own: it was only after the wind materially lessened with the coming of the rain that appreciable progress was made. So that instead of the early evening, as they had planned, it was long after midnight when they gained the little cove and cautiously approached the landing. Fortunately for their enterprise, shortly after its arrival the bireme had worked its way to a more sheltered anchorage around the point toward the west.

Although bitterly disappointed at their delay, Marcus allowed no sign of this to escape him, and without a moment's hesitation proceeded in accordance with their prearranged plan. From Lupus, who frequently had visited the island, he had gained a clear idea of the house and of its situation relative to the barracks. Leaving the freedman in charge of the boat, prepared for instant embarkation but with the understanding that, in an emergency, if summoned he should come to their assistance with part of the crew, after a final caution to Pythias not to leave the galley, followed closely by his two companions he made the best of his way up the rock, shrouded in darkness and slippery from the falling rain.

To their great relief no sentinels were encountered, and cautiously avoiding the front entrance, they skirted the edge of the rock and noiselessly approached the house from the west. Lights were shining through the windows, and as they drew nearer it was apparent that instead of being asleep at the barracks, as they had hoped, the guards were carousing within!

They stared at each other in dismay. It seemed the final destruction of their shadowy hope. Daylight would come in a few hours, there was no possible place of concealment and their men were exhausted.

At least it was plain that only the most desperate expedient might avail, and after a hasty counsel it was decided that Marcus should take his stand in the vestibule while the others attempted to enter the house from the rear. If successful one of them might hold the guards in check while the other unbolted the door: then, with aid from Lupus, they would stake everything in a surprise attack.

The circuit of the building had almost been completed before Junius discovered a small window opening, protected by a screen, on the east side of the house. The sill was barely in reach of his hands, but with the assistance of Decius he drew himself up, dislodged the screen and wormed his way through, Decius also accomplishing it by a violent effort.

They were in the little recess Octavia had occupied, and through the low, arched opening could see the boisterous crowd carousing in the room beyond the atrium. Advancing cautiously Junius, who was ahead, observed a light shining through an open door at the foot of a passage which bore to the left.

Under a sudden impulse, with a guarded gesture for his companion to remain, he stole down the passage and entered the bath—recoiling in horror before the dreadful apparition which confronted him. On the marble floor, beneath the candelabrum, lay the mortal remains of the woman they had come to save—the severed head a little to one side of the body, carelessly wrapped in its torn and discolored vestments. A trail of blood to the doorway of the *sudatorium*, from which floated a vaporous mist, revealed the method of her death.

Utterly unnerved by the dreadful disclosure, Junius reeled like a drunken man; then with a fleeting glance at

the gruesome picture, staggered from the room and blindly groped his way back along the passage.

Before he could speak Decius rasped out in a sibilant whisper:

"I know what thou hast found: scarce hadst thou gone ere Saturninus was boasting of his accursed deed. Poppæa bribed him—'tis her gold with which they have been gaming. By the gods! I can wait no longer"; and under the frenzied lash of his passions he broke away from the other's restraining grasp, and sword in hand, ran towards the triclinium, shouting furiously:

"Death to the assassins!"

In the wild confusion that ensued, Junius darted through the atrium unobserved. Glancing back while fumbling with the bolt he saw his friend contending madly with the enraged guards, two of whom had gone down in the first furious onset; but at that very moment the tribune fell, his head cleft from crown to shoulder by a terrific blow dealt by the giant Saturninus, who had stolen upon him from behind.

With a muttered oath Junius opened the door barely enough to permit his exit, and closing it softly behind him, hastened in the direction of the dim figure which ran to meet him.

"She is dead, Marcus," he cried hysterically—"suffocated in the vapor bath, and her head struck off by Saturninus, who hath just slain Decius also. They are six to one, and it is certain death even if we chance to win, but by all the gods the brute who dishonored Octavia's corse goes to Pluto this night, even if myself must show him the way!"

The tribune uttered a frightful imprecation, his eyes blazing with the savage glare of an enraged beast as he breathed hoarsely:

"Win or lose—and they were twelve to one, what matters now? By Hercules, we'll pour a libation of blood to Mars the avenger, which will need no *hypocaust* to haste

its flow"; and all the ferocity of his barbarian forbears was in the savage roar with which he bounded through the doorway and, with the sinewy patrician at his side, dashed upon the surprised and befuddled guards, who had assembled in the atrium.

Then began a slaughter grim and great. Yells, curses, groans, screams of pain and rage filled the air: men fell, struggled to their feet again, slipped on the bloody flags, and rolled about in their dying agonies, until the place became a veritable shambles—in the dim light of the smoking lamps appearing like some horrible phantasmagoria from the inferno.

Bleeding from many wounds, Varus and the tribune were still on their feet, holding fast to each other for a moment's rest before the last supreme effort. Then after wiping away the blood which obscured his vision, Junius recognized Octavia's murderer among the three who still opposed them. With a cry like that of an animal in its death agony, he leaped upon the dazed centurion, and drove the shortened sword from above, between the neck and shoulder. It was the last spark of his vitality, and together avenger and victim fell into the bloody pool and lay ghastly.

Cowed by their leader's death, the other two combatants, each slightly wounded, lowered their arms. Dispatching one of them for water, with the other's assistance Marcus was lifting his unconscious friend when a slight, boyish figure ran to his side, and with an agonized cry knelt by the prostrate form.

"I could restrain her no longer," said Lupus from the doorway, his eager glances roving about the room in savage joy. "But it happened fortunately: the men at the barracks have been aroused—make haste to the boat while I and those attending without hold them as may be."

The tribune dashed a bowl of water full in the face of Junius; with a gasp his eyes fluttered open, whereupon Marcus shook him vigorously.

“Rouse thyself if wouldst save thy wife from Octavia’s fate or worse—the reserves are coming—help them to the landing, Lupus”: then turning to the prisoners he cried peremptorily:

“Quick! Show me the way to the bath!”

With the aid of Pythias and the freedman, Junius gained his feet, but refused to go further than the vestibule until Marcus reappeared with his burden, wrapped in the leather curtain he had torn from the alcove in passing.

“My strength is spent,” he panted, resigning his load to the freedman; and they stumbled down the path as with loud shouts a score of men came running from the barracks, alarmed by the terrified physician who, at the end of the combat, had managed to climb out of the window in the alcove, where he had concealed himself. At the crest of the rise the sturdy boatmen stood their ground courageously until, at a signal from Lupus, they scrambled to the beach; and as the last man tumbled aboard, disregarding the freedman’s extended hand Marcus stepped back and, with a final call upon his indomitable spirit gave a shove to the boat, which slowly disappeared in the mist.

Bleeding from innumerable wounds, painfully the tribune dragged himself back to meet the noisy oncomers. In a feeble effort to avoid the first blow aimed at him, he tripped over an unseen object. The sword pierced his neck, and he fell without a sound—one outstretched hand resting unconsciously against the head of Octavia, which, in the desperate haste of embarkation, unnoticed had fallen on the shore.



NERO

From the bust in the Uffizi, Firenze

THE TRIUMPH OF POPPÆA

ALONE in her luxurious apartments in the palace, Poppæa was awaiting a promised visit from the Emperor.

Of late she had seen little of him. After the horrible outbreak against the Christians, following the great fire which laid waste all but four of the fourteen regions of the city, in a state of melancholia Nero hid himself in Baïæ, returning barely in time for the Circensian Games in April.

Speedily there had occurred another access of frenzy, under which he passed through the whole gamut of his degenerate vices and shocking offences: the theatrical craze yielding to the homicidal mania, which in turn gave way to a vulgar passion for chariot driving. At the moment engrossed in this latter, he spent the greater part of the daylight hours at the stables and in the Circus; afterwards carousing with the Augustians until it was time to sally forth upon those disgraceful midnight excursions in which he found such savage delight.

In all of this the Augusta had been sadly neglected. And on this particular day, ill, lonely and singularly depressed, she had so far humbled her pride as to send her freedman with an urgent plea that Cæsar should come to her. The man returned with word that the Emperor was at his bath; that he was expecting a large company at dinner, and accordingly unable to visit her until his guests departed.

Aware what a palace dinner signified in the matter of

duration, Poppæa dejectedly reconciled herself to the long period of weary waiting which must elapse before her husband would appear—if indeed he came at all. Prompted by her nurse, the attendants prolonged as far as possible the varied ministrations which were a part of the daily routine in their mistress's attempt to resist the assaults of time upon her beauty. After their departure for a while she listened in a moody abstraction while the nurse sought to distract her mind with the idle gossip of the day; then abruptly dismissing her, the unhappy Empress had passed the slow-moving hours in melancholy, somber reflection.

Three years had elapsed since the ghastly proof of Octavia's death, which she demanded, had been presented to her by the physician Macro. Deliberately assuring herself of its identity, she calmly paid over the promised gold; then gave way to her joyful emotions with an abandon which, when reported by the prefect to Petronius, occasioned the latter's philosophical comment that the lust of domination burns with a flame so fierce as to overpower all other feelings in the human breast.

Not without reason had she considered the battle won. Secure in the affections of Nero, and confident of her ability to sway his mind as she liked, with her dreaded rival forever out of the way, through her expected presentation of an heir to Cæsar she might count upon consummating her victory by winning the regard of the Roman people, albeit momentarily bound to be alienated more than ever by the murder of Octavia.

In the following spring her child had been born at Antium, Nero's own birthplace. Filled with extravagant joy he named the infant Augusta, at the same time officially conferring the title upon Poppæa; while the obsequious Senate, after journeying in a body to congratulate the Empress, decreed a temple to Fecundity and prescribed annual observance of various commemorative celebrations.

Poppæa was radiant. She had attained the zenith of her ambitions. The world was at her feet, the sky was unclouded, and a glorious future awaited.

But all this joy soon turned into mourning, since in less than four months the infant died. Nero's grief was extravagant, the populace openly sympathetic, while the Senate surpassed itself in the customary flattery by honoring the dead infant as a goddess, voting her "a couch, a temple and a priest."

But although this universal sorrow and regret presumably would strengthen her hold upon the Emperor, the magistrates and the people alike, Poppæa was inconsolable. Instinctively she felt that her star had attained its meridian, and as time passed the feeling became a settled conviction.

For a brief period, indeed, she retained her proud eminence both as the Augusta and the power behind the throne. Every honor was accorded her, including the right to ride in the *carpentum* and to occupy the front seats. She had her own carriage; and while the horses of Cæsar were shod with silver, her own were shod with gold. She had her own guard, the number of her domestics was prodigious, and she lived in the utmost luxury. So that although always conscious of the impending shadow, intoxicated with her own beauty and power for the time being she gave full reign to her unbounded pride and vanity, accepting as her right the adulation of the Roman world.

But soon it became manifest that Cæsar's truant affections were drifting; and as he began to absent himself from her company, the coveted opportunities to encourage him in his vices and depravities upon which she counted largely in maintaining her ascendancy were less frequent. At first imperceptibly, but noticeably as the Emperor's inattention became pronounced, and then more and more rapidly her power waned.

Other things had occurred to increase her disquiet and

sharpen her fears. Her son Rufinus (by her first husband) for whom always she had cherished an affection, had been cruelly put to death by the Emperor because of some youthful indiscretion. She heard that Nero again was displaying an interest in Acte, whose regular and blameless life had conduced to the preservation of her youthful charms. Tigellinus openly treated her with a careless unconcern, which plainly indicated his belief that her day had gone; while even there had come to her ears a terrible whisper that Nero was planning her death by poison.

A wild hope sprang up in her heart, when she was again able to promise Nero an heir; but although at first he seemed elated, her hope had steadily grown less under his renewed display of indifference. So that at last, on the verge of despair, she had decided to stake everything on the present interview; and her nervous tension was at its height when just as the midnight hour had been called by the slave appointed to watch the *clepsydra*, the curtains were drawn and Nero appeared in the doorway.

It was plain that Cæsar was in the advanced stages of intoxication. His clothing was greatly disordered, the torn and rumpled *synthesis* of white stained by wine and food. A handkerchief, similarly discolored, was loosely knotted about his throat—affected by him as a protection of his “heavenly voice,” of which he was inordinately proud, and with which he expected to electrify the world.

As he shuffled across the room—his slow, uncertain gait emphasizing the short, thin legs, huge protruding stomach, thick bullneck and flabby swollen face, disfigured with crimson blotches and crowned with a mop of red hair, which at that period of his life he wore in short curls, arranged in stages—he appeared the personification of some grotesque, misshapen monster chosen as the leading character in a pantomime staged by fabulous creatures from the underworld.

As on a previous memorable occasion, Poppæa had care-

fully schooled herself for the ordeal. She realized that her present task was infinitely more difficult than the former. Then it was an appeal to the senses, in which she was a consummate artist, at a moment when her personal attractions were at their height and all Nero's inclinations and burning desires were in line with her own objective. Now, at a time when he had pulled away from her, momentarily deprived of her most powerful auxiliary she was reduced to the necessity of appealing alone to his higher feelings, in the desperate hope of arousing his ambition and pride and awakening his love for the glory of his family name and his respect for the imperial dignity.

But all her carefully laid plans were swept away and her discreetly chosen phrases forgotten under the violent revulsion of feeling which was suddenly excited by his coarse, bloated face, his brutish expression and his repulsive drunken demeanor as he sank limply upon the *cathedra* drawn up beside her couch.

Raising herself from the pillows in an outburst of unrestrained anger and contempt, which would have done justice to Nero's own ungoverned temper, she upbraided him mercilessly for his vulgar, evil courses, which had exposed him to the laughter and ridicule of the whole world and made an indelible stain upon the Julian name.

Sprawled out in drunken impotence the astounded wretch glared at her in baleful silence; then, after a cumbrous and ineffectual effort to rise, with tears of maudlin anger running down his quivering face he spat on her robe and called her by a vile name.

Something gave way in Poppæa's brain. Losing all self-control, with blazing eyes and face livid with rage and hatred, she launched upon a terrible invective of his crimes and hideous offences, of which she did not hesitate to enumerate the most shocking; cursing her blind folly in listening to him, and invoking the avenging Furies without delay to rid the world of a monster so universally

despised and abhorred. And as he recoiled in terror she lashed him with the word "matricide," and shouted mercilessly:

"'Twas thine own father who declared that nothing but what was pernicious and detestable could be produced of him and Agrippina."

Then wringing her hands and sobbing hysterically as her strength gave way, she collapsed among the pillows.

With a hoarse, inarticulate cry, the wild light of insanity in his blood-shot eyes, Nero struggled to his feet. For an instant he swayed blindly; then in a frenzy of delirium he seized her by the hair, and jerking her from the couch to the floor, kicked her savagely, again and again. Uttering a horrid laugh as the quivering form of the expectant mother became still and lifeless, with a gesture of brutal triumph the madman shambled from the room.

It was the end of that "long Elysium" which, forgetful of the avenging Furies, whom she herself at last had apostrophized, exultantly Poppæa had pictured to Nero in the hour of a reconciliation predicated upon the murder of Octavia.

EPILOGUE

THERE is a tradition that Paul, gaining Poppæa's ear through influential friends in the palace, moved her to a secret acceptance of Christianity. On the other hand Josephus, the Jewish historian, in speaking of her as "a pious woman" seems to imply she inclined to the Hebrew faith. Some color to one or the other supposition may be found in the fact that instead of being burnt, according to pagan custom, her body actually was inhumated in the mausoleum of Cæsar.

The remorse for his evil deed which Nero at first displayed was short-lived. Almost immediately he proposed marriage to Antonia, Octavia's half-sister, twice widowed through the imperial rage. The proud daughter of Claudius disdainfully refusing was put to death. Thereupon Nero married Statilia Messalina, first sending her husband, the Consul Vestinus, to join his other victims. It is interesting to note that in a letter written by the Emperor Otho in anticipation of death, he "commended the care of his ashes to Messalina, Nero's widow, whom he had intended to marry": perhaps a sort of post-mortem reprisal upon his former friend for robbing him of Poppæa.

During three more years Rome groaned under the frightful misdeeds of its mad, debauched ruler: then Nemesis at last overtook the "divine artist," and the closing scene in the Tragedy of the Cæsars was enacted.

On the anniversary of his mother's murder, while Nero was fiddling in Naples, word came that the Gaulish legions under Vindex had revolted and proclaimed Galba Emperor. Making light of the news, he contented himself by

offering a reward of two hundred and fifty myriads to the person who should kill Vindex: upon learning of which the dauntless Gaul rejoined:

"The person who kills Nero and brings me his head may take mine in return": concluding with an impassioned appeal to the Roman world to forever rid itself of the monster who oppressed and disgraced it.

Vindex fell; but the revolt spread rapidly, and within a month all the provincial legions declared for Galba. Still the fatuous young Cæsar appeared carelessly unconcerned. Perhaps it was in reliance upon the pronouncement of the Delphic Oracle, whom he had consulted, that "Nero should beware the seventy-third year"; with its implied promise of a long extension of his glory and power. In such case, like the Emperor Caligula, he fatally misinterpreted the prophecy, actually intended as a warning against Galba, who recently had attained his seventy-second birthday.

In the early part of June there came a night, hot and oppressive, when asleep in the palace Nero was overtaken by a terrible dream. He fancied that a vast swarm of winged ants settled down upon him. In response to his agonized cry for help Octavia appeared and began dragging him down into a bottomless pit. With a loud scream he awoke, and leaped from his bed at the moment a terrified slave ran into the room crying that the prætorians had repudiated him and proclaimed Galba.

Frantic with terror, he sent the messenger for Tigellinus; but the prefect had fled. Also it was disclosed that the palace gates were unguarded and of his innumerable slaves and attendants all had disappeared except Sporus, who had brought the news, and the freedman Phaon.

Unnerved by fear he resolved to die, and dispatched the slave for Spicilius the gladiator, or someone else to kill him; and when no one could be found, he cried despairingly:

"Have I now neither friend nor foe?"

Then he bethought himself of some poison Locusta had prepared; but in ransacking his apartments while he slept the slaves had stolen it for the golden box in which it was contained!

At last Phaon proposed his villa, outside the Nomentana gate, as a place of refuge. An old horse was obtained, and barefoot, wrapped in an old cloak, with face muffled, and accompanied only by Phaon, Sporus and his Secretary who arrived at the last moment, the ruler of the world set out upon his fearsome midnight journey.

The night was still and dark, with occasional flashes of lightning and the muttering of distant thunder. As they stumbled along the Alta Semita, leading up the Quirinal, an extraordinary earthquake shook the ground, and sweating with fear the half-demented wretch imagined he saw the ghosts of all those he had murdered coming up through the rent earth, and in fancy heard them menacing and gibbering at him from the wayside.

In passing the camp his terrors increased as he heard the soldiers shouting for Galba and demanding the head of "Ahenobarbus"!

Approaching the bridge Nero's horse shied at a corpse lying in the road. As the shawl dropped from his face, aided by an opportune flash of lightning, in mute surprise a passing wayfarer recognized the Emperor.

After crossing the stream the travelers took the left-hand road. Four miles beyond the gate they turned into a lane, and a few moments later were forcing their way through brambles and bushes in order to approach the villa unseen. While the others were making a hole in the rear wall, Nero hid himself in a reedy swamp. There, lying flat on the ground, he waited in abject terror until daylight. If a dog barked anywhere, or a bird chirped, or a bush or a twig was shaken by the breeze, he was thrown into a violent tremor.

At last the breach was effected and Nero crawled through on his hands and knees. After pulling the thorns

from his cloak and gnawing a crust of coarse bread, he lay down on a wretched pallet, with an old coverlet thrown over it, murmuring incessantly some lines from the "Ædipus" which he had sung in his last public performance on the stage:

"Wife, mother, father force me to my end!"

A slave of Phaon's ran in with a letter which stated that Nero had been declared an enemy by the Senate, that search was being made for him and when found he would be punished "according to the ancient custom." Feebly enquiring what the punishment was, he was told that after being stripped naked the prisoner's neck was fastened in a forked stake and he was scourged to death.

Terrified beyond measure he reached out his hand for the dagger which Phaon presented, crying miserably:

"Oh, what an artist is about to perish!"

Advised by the man who had recognized him at the bridge, horsemen from camp, under orders to take him alive, were approaching the house. As Nero heard them coming, in a trembling voice he uttered a line from the *Iliad*:

"The noise of swift-heeled steeds assails my ear"—and assisted by Epaphroditus drove the dagger into his throat just as the soldiers burst into the room.

Attempting to staunch the flow of blood, the centurion pretended he had come to the Emperor's assistance; to which Nero replied:

"It is too late; is this your loyalty?" And immediately he expired, with his eyes fixed and starting out of his head, to the terror of all who beheld him. *It was the sixth anniversary of Octavia's death.*

As a last favor Nero had begged of his attendants that his head should not be severed and his body should be burnt. This was granted by Galba's freedman; and the forsaken Acte and his old nurses, Ecloge and Alexandra, deposited his ashes in the tomb of the Domitii on the Pincian Hill.

The wild rejoicing over Nero's death had scarce subsided when Junius and his wife, who after their escape from Pandataria had fled to Greece, and since lived continuously in the East, returned to Rome.

Crushed by the terrible events at the island, Pythias had welcomed their exile, fervently hoping that Rome had passed out of her life forever. But time distils a subtle balm which ameliorates most earthly sorrows. And upon receipt of an urgent appeal from Pomponia, who had lost her husband and was ailing, imploring their return, which now would be unattended with danger, she eagerly acquiesced in her husband's affirmative decision.

Following the great fire in Rome, commonly ascribed to Nero, the Christians were tortured and put to death under circumstances of the greatest atrocity. Although nominally punished for arson, actually their persecution was based on the accusation of a hatred of mankind—"odio generis humani," characterized by a profound student of the period as a formula which embraces atheism and anarchism as well as high treason.

But from the tyrant's death until the reign of Domitian there ensued for the Believers a long period of tolerance and peace. Thus Pythias and her husband found it possible soon after their return covertly to remove Octavia's ashes from a lonely spot on the Campanian coast to Pomponia's privately owned cemetery near the second milestone on the Appian Way, where the bodies of many of her companions in the Faith secretly had been interred. And here also, a little later, they assisted in the last solemn offices for the venerable matron herself (by some identified with the traditional Lucina, who claimed the body of Paul from the executioner), the fact of whose interment in the cemetery of Callixtus has been attested by the discovery there of an inscription bearing her name.

Strive as she might, the wife of Aulus never was able to convert her husband to the Christian faith. After their return from the East the General saw much of the

Apostle, then living in Rome unmolested, although under surveillance. Already prepossessed in Paul's favor by reason both of Pomponia's reverential regard for him and of his spirited bearing at the trial in Cæsarea, the old soldier was further impressed by his fearlessness, his fiery vehemence and his wonderful eloquence in preaching the new faith—which indeed seems to have created a profound sensation among the prætorians and even in the imperial household. But with Aulus the inborn superstitions were too strong, and he died as he had lived, a firm believer in the pagan cult. In deference to his known wishes his body was burnt and the ashes placed in the family mausoleum at Tibur. And upon the tomb of the Plautii, near the Ponte Lucano over the Anio at Tivoli, still may be read the epitaph of Pomponia's martial husband, reciting his lofty services and the honors he received.

For Pythias the passing years and the birth of her boy and girl largely negatived the somber influences of the past: although the shadow of that one awful night at Pandataria never was absolutely dispelled.

In the close fellowship of her loved ones on their beautiful Sabine farm, with its simple, healthful life, its serene and steady joys, she found abiding happiness: although in its highest moments there was a vague sense of something missing, since the death of those we love is one of the absolutely irreparable losses in life. Ever and anon, too, Junius grew restive under the placid routine of country life, and she knew it was only a matter of time when Rome would beckon him with compelling gesture.

But that was in the will of the gods—in the endurance of which, when it should be demanded of her, the high-spirited daughter of Fabius confidently believed her Roman courage would not fail.

Although perhaps her life accorded more closely with the precepts of Christ than sometimes has been reflected in the conduct of certain of His professed followers, Pythias never embraced the new faith. But who shall venture to

declare that thereby she was far from the Kingdom of God? Rather may we think of her as being of the essence of those shadowed forth in the musing of the Beloved Disciple, so beautifully related in the closing lines of "*Christus*":

"From all vain pomps and shows,
From the pride that overflows,
And the false conceits of men;
From all the narrow rules
And subtleties of Schools,
And the craft of tongue and pen;
Bewildered in its search,
Bewildered with the cry,
Lo here—lo there, the Church!
Poor, sad Humanity
Through all the dust and heat
Turns back with bleeding feet
By the weary road it came,
Unto the simple thought
By the great Master taught
And that remaineth still:
*Not he that repeateth the name—
But he that doeth the will!"*

GLOSSARY

actum est: it is finished.

adjutor: a deputy.

adlocutio: the speech, or address of an imperator to his soldiers.

alba linea: a white cord drawn across the course, to indicate the starting line in racing.

amata: a beloved woman.

annulus pronubus: an engagement ring—in ancient Roman times made of iron.

anteambulones: slaves who cleared a way through the crowds for their masters.

apparitor: the free attendant of a Roman magistrate.

atriensis: a Roman house-slave, having especial charge of the *atrium*.

atrium: the family assembly room of a Roman house.

aurei: gold coins.

auriga: the driver of a chariot in the Circus.

Bona Dea: the "Good goddess," presiding over the earth and all its blessings; also the patron goddess of chastity in women.

cæstus: leather bands tied around the hands of boxers, to make their blows more powerful.

calceus: a shoe of the kind worn in public.

calda: warm water mixed with wine and spices.

camilli: boys employed in religious rites and ceremonies.

cara mea: my dear.

carcer: a prison.

carceres: a row of vaulted chambers, starting points of the chariots in the Circus races.

Carinæ: the "Upper Fifth Avenue" of early imperial Rome.

carpentum: the State carriage, used in public festal processions.

carruca: a travelling carriage on four wheels.

cathedra: a chair with a back, but without arms.

caupona: an inn.

cella ostiarii: the room or alcove of the house janitor.

cena: the principal meal of the Romans.

cippus: a low column of stone, used as a sepulchral monument.

circus primus: the large area, at the upper (west) end of the Circus.

circus inferior: the smaller area at the lower end of the Circus.

cognomen: an additional personal name, used as especially appropriate to the individual.

conclamatum est: it is all over—"all is lost."

congiarium: a present of corn, or other provisions, to the people.

consilium: a council, or body of advisers.

contubernales: a free man and a slave, or two slaves, who while not allowed to contract a legal marriage, live together as man and wife.

coquus: a cook.

cornix: a crow.

crepidæ: a kind of shoes—between a closed boot and a sandal.

cubiculum: a bed room.

cubicularius: a slave in charge of sleeping and dwelling rooms.

culleus: a leather bag.

decretum: the judicial decision of a supreme magistrate.

delator: a professional informer.

designator: one who regulates the order of a funeral procession.

desultor: a bare-back rider, using two horses from which he vaults back and forth while at full gallop.

dies juvenatus: that day of the Saturnalia devoted to youthful sports.

Diræ: The Furies, or goddesses who hunt for criminals; the Erinyes of the Greeks.

divortium: divorce.

domus rusticana: a country house.

donatio: a gift.

donativum: a present of money made to Roman soldiers.

epistola: a letter written upon paper to an absent person, as distinguished from one written on waxen tablets.

ergastulum: a place of correction attached to country places where slaves who were kept in fetters were lodged and made to work.

Erebus: a dark and gloomy region of the lower world.

familia: the members of a household.

fascēs: a bundle of rods tied together with a red strap, enclosing an axe, the head outside—an emblem of authority, its use accorded to certain magistrates.

Feriæ: Roman holidays, dedicated to the worship of certain deities.

Flamen Dialis: the High Priest of Jupiter.

Fortuna Virilis: the Italian goddess of woman's happiness in married life, and of boys and youths who dedicated to her the first cuttings of their beards—from which she was called *Fortuna Barbata*. See *Mater Matuta*.

funus: a funeral—so called because in early Roman times when burial was by torchlight, twisted ropes (*funalia*) smeared with pitch were carried by the mourners.

Haruspices: Etruscan soothsayers, who interpreted the divine will from the entrails of sacrificial victims.

honesta missio: a discharge with honor.

Ides: the middle of the month—either the 13th or 15th.

imagines majorum: waxen portrait-masks of deceased ancestors or other relatives.

imperium: the ultimate authority over all members of the Roman State.

insulæ: tenements for poor families.

Io: ho! huzza!

jubilator: a mounted attendant of a racing charioteer.

jentaculum: breakfast.

Kalends: first day of the month.

lacerna: a light mantel worn over the toga on outdoor occasions.

lanista: a trainer of gladiators.

lanternarius: a lantern bearer.

lararium: a part of the Roman house where the household gods were worshipped.

lares compitales: the gods who presided at street corners and crossways.

lares familiares: the gods who presided over homes.

laudatio funebris: a funeral oration.

lectica: a litter.

lecticarii: litter bearers.

lectus: a bed.

lectus funebris: an uncovered couch or bier used as a funeral litter.

legatus proprætor: the governor of a Roman province.

libellus: a race card, with list of the horses and names of the drivers.

ludi: public spectacles, contests and games.

lustrali censu: the lustral census, taken every five years, during which slaves might be freed by their masters.

manes: the spirit of the dead—a ghost, or shade.

manus: the absolute authority of the husband over the wife.

mappa: a napkin.

mater alma: dear mother.

Mater matuta: Italian goddess of Dawn and Birth. Her temple yet standing in the Bocca della Verità (in the year 880 A. D. converted into the Church of Santa

Maria Egiziaca) is commonly, although improperly, ascribed to *Fortuna Virilis* (See Title).

At the celebration on April 21, 1921 of the 2674th anniversary of the foundation of the City, in commemoration of the event the Minister of Public instruction inaugurated the work of restoration of this little temple to its ancient form.

matralia: the festival of mothers at Rome.

matrona: a name applied by the Romans to every honorable married woman.

meretrix: a woman of loose character.

metæ: the turning posts at either end of the course in the Roman circus.

milites stationarii: a quasi-military force under command of the prefect of the city.

mimes: a character play of every day life, acted in front of the curtain as a sort of after piece.

mimi: mimic actors.

misera puellæ: unhappy little girl.

moriones: buffoons.

Nonæ: the ninth day before the full moon—the seventh of the month in May, March, July and October; in other months the fifth.

nomenclator: a sort of usher, to announce names that their owners might receive proper recognition.

oppidum: a stronghold—a walled town.

ostiarius: the janitor of a Roman house.

ostium: the entrance hall in a Roman house.

palla: a cloak.

patria potestas: the absolute paternal authority of a father over his children.

peculium: money accumulated by a master for his slave—used by the latter to purchase his freedom.

pilentum: a carriage on four wheels used by the Flamens and Vestals.

pilleus: a round felt cap, without brim.

pilleolus: a close-fitting cap worn by a freed slave.

- podium*: a raised stage or box in the amphitheatre reserved for the Emperor and other dignitaries.
- pollinctor*: the undertaker's assistant whose special duty was to lay out the corse.
- pompa*: a solemn procession.
- popina*: an eating and drinking house.
- porta*: the gate of a city.
- præficæ*: hired female mourners at Roman funerals.
- prægustator*: a slave who tasted the dishes before his master to guard against poisoning.
- prætorium*: the headquarters and central area in the Roman camp.
- prandium*: the second meal—a luncheon.
- pronuba*: a woman, who had been only once married, who gave the bride away at a Roman wedding.
- puellula*: a little girl.
- pueri patrimi et matrimi*: boys both of whose parents are alive, a prerequisite of their service in certain religious functions.
- pulvinar*: the throne of the Empress in the Circus.
- quadriva*: a place where four roads meet.
- quinquatrus*: the festival of Minerva on March nineteenth.
- reda*: a four-wheeled carriage.
- repudium*: a repudiation of marriage.
- Sacra Via*: the principal street in ancient Rome. It led from the valley between the Cælian and Esquiline hills, through the Forum to the Capitol.
- sagum*: a military cloak.
- salve*: "Greetings"—"Be well!"
- sculponeæ*: the wooden shoes worn by peasants and slaves.
- scurræ*: panderers.
- sella*: a sedan chair.
- senatus consultum*: a decree of the Roman senate.
- solarium*: the flat roof of a Roman house.
- spes rediviva*: hope revived.
- spina*: ("back-bone") a long low wall which ran between

- the going and returning course of the racers in the Circus.
- stadium*: a course for foot races, etc.: also a measure of distance, about an eighth of a mile.
- stola*: the outer garment worn by Roman matrons.
- structor*: a servant who arranged the dishes—also one who carved.
- subura*: a densely populated and rather disreputable quarter of ancient Rome, lying between the Esquiline, Quirinal and Viminal hills.
- sudatorium*: a vapor bath.
- suggestum*: an elevated platform.
- summa sacra via*: the highest point of the Sacred Street, where it crossed the Velia at the lower end of the Forum.
- synthesis*: a short easy garment, in bright colors, for indoor use by men: a "dinner coat."
- tabellæ*: writing tablets.
- taberna*: a tavern.
- tablinum*: a room in a Roman house which contained the family records and archives.
- tesseræ*: dice.
- thyrsus*: a staff wreathed with ivy and vine leaves, terminating at the top in a pine cone.
- tibicinæ*: female flute-players.
- toga*: the distinctive garment of the Roman citizen when appearing in public.
- toga picta*: a robe adorned with golden stars—worn by a General in his triumph.
- toga prætexta*: worn by boys until manhood and by girls until marriage; a toga with an interwoven purple stripe, worn by certain dignitaries.
- tonstrina*: a barber.
- triclinium*: a dining room.
- tricliniarcha*: the servant in charge of the dining room.
- triumphator*: a victorious Roman general entitled to a triumph.

tunica: a loose garment worn next to the person by men and women.

tunica intima: a close-fitting undergarment, reaching over the knee, worn by women.

tunica interior: an undergarment worn beneath the tunic proper.

tunica palmata: robe adorned by palm branches, worn by a General in his triumph.

vale: "Farewell."

velia: a low ridge projecting from the Palatine Hill across the Forum, where the Arch of Titus stands.

verbenæ: the plant vervain—sometimes called "Juno's tears."

vernum triclinium: a dining room for use in the spring and summer, facing north.

Vestalis maxima: the Head Vestal.

viator: a subordinate official of a Roman magistrate for sending a message or executing an arrest.

vicarius: an under-servant, or deputy.

vigiles: policemen.

vittæ: ribbons or bands to confine the hair—worn by free-born ladies to distinguish them from women of the town.

vivaria: enclosures for keeping wild beasts.

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